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# THE BLACK FORGE MILLS;

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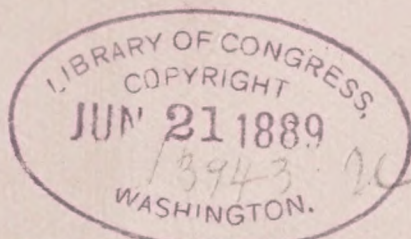
## UP THE KING'S HIGHWAY.

BY

WILLIAM PENDLETON CHIPMAN,

*Author of "The Mill Boy of the Genesee," etc.*

35-  
"Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."



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## DEDICATION.

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REMEMBERING THE EARNEST AND EFFICIENT HELP I HAVE  
EVER RECEIVED IN ALL MY STUDY AND TOIL FROM HER  
WHOM GOD HAS GRACIOUSLY PERMITTED FOR  
MORE THAN TEN YEARS TO WALK BY MY  
SIDE, I DEDICATE THIS TRUE STORY  
IN DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO

MY BELOVED WIFE.



# CONTENTS.

---

## CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
THE BLACK FORGE MILLS, . . . . .	7

## CHAPTER II.

MISS SQUIRE'S NEW SCHOLAR, . . . . .	22
--------------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER III.

ONE NIGHT'S WORK, . . . . .	41
-----------------------------	----

## CHAPTER IV.

RAY'S CONFESSION OF CHRIST, . . . . .	53
---------------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER V.

OLD TIES SEVERED, . . . . .	66
-----------------------------	----

## CHAPTER VI.

LONG POINT FARM, . . . . .	78
----------------------------	----

## CHAPTER VII.

THE BURGLARY, . . . . .	89
-------------------------	----

## CHAPTER VIII.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY, . . . . .	101
---------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER IX.

RAY'S TRIAL AND ACQUITTAL, . . . . .	117
--------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER X.

FRUIT AT THE MILLS, . . . . .	136
-------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XI.

RAY IN HIS SCHOOL LIFE, . . . . .	152
-----------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XII.

GOOD FOR EVIL, . . . . .	165
--------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XIII.

	PAGE
THE STRIKE, . . . . .	185

## CHAPTER XIV.

GEORGE BRANFORD'S HOME, . . . . .	196
-----------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XV.

FIRE AT THE MILLS, . . . . .	208
------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT IS DUTY, . . . . .	218
-------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XVII.

RAY'S DECISION AND ITS RESULT, . . . . .	231
--	-----

## CHAPTER XVIII.

CLINTON ACADEMY, . . . . .	246
----------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XIX.

SHOWING THEIR COLORS, . . . . .	259
---------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XX.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH, . . . . .	270
--------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE WIDENESS OF GOD'S MERCY, . . . . .	283
--	-----

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST YEAR AT EASTON, . . . . .	300
------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XXIII.

A SUMMER'S VACATION, . . . . .	316
--------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XXIV.

LIFE'S WORK BEGUN, . . . . .	332
------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XXV.

RAY'S FULL SURRENDER, . . . . .	343
---------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XXVI.

HOPE'S FULL FRUITION AT LAST, . . . . .	355
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# THE BLACK FORGE MILLS;

OR,

## UP THE KING'S HIGHWAY.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE BLACK FORGE MILLS.

THE fragrant odor of sweet fern, and of pine and hemlock came to Ralph Carleton, the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Afton, as he leaned against the low window sill of his study. As he thus leaned he looked off toward the hills, which rose abruptly just back of the busy town. A heavy rain the night before had refreshed the thirsty earth, and clothed it anew in beauty. A perfect scene was spread before him, and, accustomed as he was to it, it still possessed for him new charms.

Field and grove were green and leafy; the waters of the broad bay sparkled in the sunlight, and the pure balmy air gave an indescribable sense of exhilaration. Morning glories, honeysuckles, and grape vines struggled for supremacy on the high trellis at the side of the tiny

garden; roses clambered over the porch, and bud and blossom fairly rioted in profusion. The hum of bees, and the glad song of birds added to the perfection of that early June day, and to the young minister, who drank it all in with keenest enjoyment, there came an irresistible longing to throw aside his books and unfinished sermon for a ramble among the hills.

“I will do it,” said he, eagerly, changing his dressing gown for his coat, and his slippers for his shoes. “In God’s great temple I will seek fresh inspiration for my unfinished task, and who knows but that I shall meet the Master there, and receive the power that will make my words a living message; my tongue ‘like as of fire.’”

A moment later, equipped for a long tramp, he entered the street, and walked briskly off toward the outskirts of the town.

After a half hour of hard climbing he reached a small plateau near the summit of the hill, from which an extended view could be obtained of the surrounding country. He had often heard his people speak of the beauty of this view since his coming to Afton; but as he now paused and for the first time took in the scene, an exclamation of surprise and delight escaped him.

Right at his feet lay the large and rapidly growing town, with its well-kept streets, its tasteful residences, and its huge manufactories; and yet, so far above it was he, that none of its din reached his ears, and only the

tall chimneys, dark with smoke, told of the busy life going on there. In front of the town stretching away beyond the reach of human vision, and wonderfully suggestive of the unseen beyond, was the broad bay, its tossing waters dotted with sails of every size and many a hue. Well-cultivated farms extended to the bay on either side, and their growing crops waved gently to and fro in the balmy breeze. Back on the hillsides, and over the hilltops the dark forests lifted up their lofty heads, and perfumed the air with their piny fragrance. Altogether, it was a picture to delight an artist's eye, and Mr. Carleton, throwing himself down upon the greensward, eagerly took in the varied panorama, and felt his soul lifted by nature's matchless scenery nearer to nature's God.

His text for the coming Sunday came to his mind: "His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise." And under the inspiration of his surroundings, and his consciousness of the Spirit's presence and help, his theme developed with marvelous rapidity. Taking a note book from his pocket, he jotted down thought after thought, utterly regardless of the lapse of time, until his sermon was finished. Then, looking at his watch, he found it was half-past eleven.

"Well," he remarked, "notwithstanding my long tramp, the morning has proved exceedingly profitable. Surely God has met and helped me here, and I will thank him for it."

Kneeling down by a boulder lying near, he poured forth his soul in thankfulness to God for his help, and asked for his blessing upon the message when it should be given to his people. When he arose a look of quiet peace rested upon his face, and new strength and courage for the Master's work were in his heart.

He now began his descent, taking a different route from that by which he had come, because it seemed to be shorter. He soon found, however, that the path led around the brow of the hill to the opposite side. As he was about to retrace his steps his eye rested upon a portion of the village which from the plateau he had not seen.

Below him there was a small valley, separated from the main portion of the town by a sharp declivity. Through this a considerable stream went foaming and dashing to the bay no great distance off. Along the banks of the stream five large buildings with their massive chimneys were built; and clustered about them were a half hundred or more tenement houses, exactly alike in size and hue. Mr. Carleton had no need to read the huge white letters on the roofs of the factories to know that they were the Black Forge Woolen Mills.

There came directly to his mind a conversation he had held only the Sunday before with Mr. Bacon, the superintendent of the mills. He had preached that morning on Christ's work in foreign lands. When he

came down from the pulpit, Mr. Bacon had shaken hands with him, saying :

“ Well, pastor, I have no objection to Christian work among the heathen. In fact I believe in it; but if there ever was a heathen field that needed immediate cultivation, we have it down at Black Forge Mills.”

“ Have you done your duty by it, then, my brother ? ” Mr. Carleton had asked.

Mr. Bacon, shrugging his shoulders, had replied :

“ We are told not to cast our pearls before swine.”

“ But are you sure they are *all* swine ? ” the pastor had quickly asked ; “ and are our skirts clear from their blood until as faithful watchmen we have warned those people of their danger ? ”

Mr. Bacon at once had answered :

“ You are right, Brother Carleton ; and for a long time I have felt that they should have some religious privileges. If they won't come to us, we must take the gospel to them. Come down, and look over the ground at an early day, and we will see what can be done.”

Mr. Carleton had given the desired promise, and now as he looked down upon the mills he was reminded of it.

“ I can get there by the time the workmen come out for dinner, and it will give me an unusual opportunity to see them all together,” he murmured. “ I will go, though it will make me late at home.” And he hastened away in that direction.

As he reached the main street of the village, he saw a half dozen boys from four to ten years of age at play. Pausing a moment, he asked the oldest:

“Would you like to go to Sunday-school, my boy?”

“What’s that?” the lad inquired, curiously.

“It is a school where you learn God’s truth, and the story of his Son, Jesus Christ,” Mr. Carleton explained.

“Whose he?” the boy asked. “I never heard of him before. I guess he don’t live in these parts, does he?”

Laying his hand on the boy’s head, the minister earnestly said:

“It is God who made this world, and all there is in it; and he through his great love for us sent his only Son Jesus to die for our sins.”

“What are ye givin’ us?” the boy answered, with the air of one who was being imposed upon. “If that was so, don’t ye ’spose I’d ’ave heard it before?”

Mr. Carleton walked slowly on toward the mill office, convinced that the Black Forge Mill field did indeed stand in need of immediate Christian work. He found that Mr. Bacon was not in; but a clerk told him that in five minutes more the noon whistle would blow, and from the office door he could see the mill hands file out through the gates.

Scarcely had the first note of the whistle sounded on the air, when men, women, and half-grown children, as if glad for even a brief respite from their monotonous

toil, hastened out from the different buildings, and, pressing in one vast throng through the ponderous gateway scattered among the tenement houses for dinner. What a motley crowd it was! The old and the young were there, the weak and the strong, the ragged and the neat, the coarse and the delicate, the grave and the gay. But upon every face there was written more or less of that stolid indifference which comes from pinching poverty, excessive toil, and reckless living.

"Five hundred and sixty-two of them," remarked the clerk to Mr. Carleton; "and a harder set you never saw, men, women, or children. I won't except a single one. By the way," he added, as the minister started down the office steps, "you had better keep the middle of the street as you go up town, or some of those youngsters will be throwing eggs or stones at you. I saw Ray Branford, the biggest scamp among them all, and the greatest daredevil, too, have his eyes on you as he passed; you won't be the first minister he has insulted."

With a laugh Mr. Carleton replied, "Oh, I fear no trouble," and hurried out of the gate.

He had not gone a dozen rods when a stone thrown from some neighboring corner struck his hat, and sent it spinning to the ground, eight or ten feet away.

"Hoorah! Hoorah! Bully for you, Ray!" shouted a chorus of voices.

Mr. Carleton picked up his hat, and turned around,

hardly expecting to see any one. To his surprise, however, a tall, well-developed lad of fifteen or sixteen years, stood on the nearest corner, with a stone in his right hand, while back of him was a squad of boys of all ages and sizes, from whom the shouts came.

"Well, parson," the boy with the stone coolly asked, "how was that for a shot?"

Amused at the boy's audacity, Mr. Carleton replied :

"It certainly was well done ; but what if the stone had struck my head ?"

"No fear of that, parson," the lad promptly answered. "Put on your hat, and I'll take it off again without hurting a hair of your head."

Without the slightest hesitation, Mr. Carleton put on his hat, saying:

"All right! I am ready."

With a quick, sharp jerk the stone left the boy's hand, and again the hat went spinning several yards away.

Mr. Carleton again picked it up, and walked slowly toward the boy.

"May I ask your name?" he inquired.

"Ray Branford."

"Well, Ray, have you ever heard the story of William Tell, who shot his arrow through an apple on his own boy's head?"

"No, sir."

In as interesting manner as possible Mr. Carleton told

the story to the boys, who without fear drew around him.

"That was good," Ray commented, when he had finished. "I believe I could have done that."

"I think you could have done it with practice; for your present feat shows that you have a keen eye and a steady arm," said Mr. Carleton; "but I know another story of a mere lad who, with a single stone in a sling, killed a great giant."

"Was it Jack the Giant Killer?" asked one of the boys. "If 'twas, I've read him."

"No," replied the minister, suppressing a smile; "his name was David, and he lived in Bible times, and by slaying this giant he saved his country from the enemy."

"I'd like to hear about it, sir," said Ray, respectfully. "I can kill a bird with a sling; I have often done it."

"I wouldn't do it any more," said Mr. Carleton; "for it is cruel to kill them just for the fun of the thing. But it happens that next Sunday our lesson in the Bible school is about this David and the giant he killed. The school meets at twelve o'clock. How many of you boys will come up there and hear about it?"

"I will," said Ray, promptly. None of the other lads, however, would give the promise; so, telling Ray he would be on the lookout for him, Mr. Carleton walked rapidly off toward home.

Ray looked after him until he had disappeared; then,

turning to his companions, he said, with marked emphasis on his words: "Fellows, that parson is a brick; and I want you to understand he is to come and go around these mills as he pleases, without any interference from any of you. The first one of you I hear of abusing him, I'll souse you in the ditch, no matter when it is, or who ye are." And having delivered his message with the air of one who expected implicit obedience, he went up a side street, and entered a house standing near the stream.

The door of the house opened directly into a room, which a single glance showed to be kitchen, dining, and sitting room, all in one. A long table was stretched nearly across the room, and at this four men and three women were sitting, eating with that haste and voraciousness characteristic of those who feel that even their meal-time is limited. Another woman was moving rapidly about the table, waiting on those seated there; while three or four half-clad and dirty children crawled about the floor.

Taking a vacant place at the table, Ray helped himself from the huge dish of cabbage, pork, and potatoes, and began to eat with the same rapidity and greediness that characterized the others.

"What mischief has delayed ye this time?" asked the oldest of the men, and one whose bloated visage suggested reckless dissipation.

"I only stopped, pop, to stone the parson," the boy coolly answered.

"Ye might have been in better business," growled his father.

"Yes, such as gettin' drunk and beatin' the ole woman," Ray, in perfect mimicry of his father's tones, replied.

A low oath was the only answer.

"What did the parson do?" one of the women at the table, a sister of the lad, asked curiously.

"Picked up his hat, put it on his head, and asked me to knock it off again," replied the lad, while he still ate greedily.

"I don't believe it," said another sister.

"He certainly did, and I as certainly knocked it off again," affirmed Ray.

"Then what did he do?" asked one of his brothers, moving back from the table.

"He told me about a man named Tell, who shot an arrow through an apple on the head of his boy, and about a fellow named David, who killed a giant with a stone. He said the last story was in the Bible, and asked me to come up to his Sunday-school and hear about it."

"Of course you'll go," said the brother, with a sneer.

"I promised to go, and Ray Branford keeps his word ;

which is more than either of his brothers can say," responded the lad, hotly.

"Hoorah! our Ray will be a minister yet," shouted his youngest sister, pulling his hair as she passed by him.

A general laugh followed this sally.

"He is the only one out of the whole lot of which such a thing is possible," sharply answered the woman waiting at the table, and who was the wife of Ray's oldest brother. Then stopping beside the boy, she said, in a tone too low for the others to hear:

"Mother is suffering dreadfully, Ray. I wish you'd go in and see her before you go back to the mill."

He arose, and, crossing the room, entered a small bedroom. On the bed lay a woman; and even to the most casual observer the hacking cough and hectic flush told that her days were numbered.

In a rough sort of a way, that he intended should indicate kindness, Ray asked:

"How are ye to-day, mam?"

"Growing weaker every moment, my son," the woman feebly answered. Then anxiously: "Didn't I hear you say that you had been stoning the minister?"

"Only to knock his hat off, mam," he replied. Then, knowing it would please his mother, he added: "But he got the best of me, as I have promised to go up to his church next Sunday."

"The Lord be praised for that!" fervently ejaculated

his mother. "If you would only go every Sunday, Ray."

"Perhaps I'll like it so well I'll keep on going." And the boy laughed at the very thought.

Then the whistle blew, and he hurried off to the mill.

Two hours later his sister-in-law came hurriedly into the mill, and, with blanched cheeks, said :

"Ray, your mother is dying, and wants you at once."

"Have you told pop?" he inquired, adjusting his jack so that he could leave it.

"Yes, and the others," she hastily replied. "Your sisters are over at the house already; but father and the boys won't come."

With a word of explanation to the overseer of his room, Ray started on the run for the house. His mother was still conscious when he entered the room, and, recognizing him, gasped out :

"Ray, get a Bible, quick!"

The boy knew there was none in the house, and hastened out into the street.

"Grandfather Peck is the only one I know of that would be likely to have a Bible," he said to himself, and hurried down a lane toward a little brown house at the extreme end.

To his hasty knock a pleasant voice responded :  
"Come in!"

“Ho! Ray, is it you?” an old white-haired man, confined to the bed in one corner of the room, asked.

“Yes, grandfather,” responded Ray. “But mother is very sick, and wants a Bible. Have you got one?”

“Yes; there it is at the foot of the bed,” the old man answered. “And, Ray, read her the first part of the forty-third chapter of Isaiah. That’ll comfort her.”

“Who’s he?” Ray asked, quickly.

“I forgot how little you and the others around here know of that blessed book,” the old man replied, with a heavy sigh. “Here, I have opened the book at the place. Hurry home with it now.”

Ray, with the Bible open at the specified chapter, ran back to his home. His mother was bolstered up in bed, and, kneeling by her side, he read as best he could the holy words: “But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name: thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.”

A sudden movement of his mother caused him to stop his reading and look up. She had raised herself up to a

sitting position, her arms were extended, her eyes were turned heavenward, her lips moved :

“Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name: thou art mine.” She repeated the words once, twice, thrice, in a clear, strong voice, and then fell back upon the pillow—dead!

Those divine words were the only legacy she had left her boy.

## CHAPTER II.

### MISS SQUIRE'S NEW SCHOLAR.

ABOUT ten o'clock the next evening the door bell of the First Church parsonage rang with a sharp and prolonged peal, as though pulled by a vigorous hand. The servant had gone to her room long before; so Mr. Carleton, who sat in the cozy parlor, reading to his wife, arose and went to the door. Mrs. Carleton heard him, with surprise manifest in his tones, say "Good-evening!" The caller, whoever he was, replied at some length, but in a voice too low for her to understand his words; then he and Mr. Carleton went up to the study.

It was nearly an hour later when they came down, the visitor going directly out, while Mr. Carleton, closing and locking the door, came to the parlor. He seemed surprised to find his wife still waiting for him, and said:

"Had I known you were sitting up for me, Mary, I would have dismissed my caller sooner."

"Oh, it was my own choice," she replied, as they entered their room together. "But who was your visitor?"

"Ray Branford, the boy who stoned me yesterday down at Black Forge Mills," he answered, with a thoughtful expression still on his face.

“Why, what did he want at this time of night?”

“His mother is dead, and he came for me to attend the funeral service to-morrow morning.”

“To-morrow, Saturday morning! How can you afford the time?”

“I must, even if other things are neglected. You could hardly expect that people to understand that a minister should always be consulted before the hour for a funeral service is decided; and just at this time I am anxious to secure every hold upon them that is possible. It may be that this funeral will prove to be the entering wedge for giving the gospel to them. They certainly stand in sad need of it.”

“I knew this Mrs. Branford was dead,” he went on, “Mr. Bacon having told me of it last evening; but as they frequently bury their friends down there without any religious service, he did not know whether I would be called upon or not. Nor would I have been but for this boy. His father already lies in a state of beastly intoxication, though the dead body of the wife and mother still lies in the house; his brothers are utterly indifferent whether there is a funeral service or not, but the sisters, through Ray’s earnest solicitation, have finally consented that I should come, though they stipulate that there shall be no preaching.”

“This boy, then, seems to be the most Christianized of the whole lot,” Mrs. Carleton remarked.

"Possibly in some respects," answered her husband. "Still, he unhesitatingly says that but for our meeting yesterday, neither would he have thought of having me. I seem to have quite won his heart by my method of dealing with him. I could hardly repress a smile to-night when, with the air of one who has absolute authority down there, he informed me I need not fear to come and go among that people, as he had already issued his orders that I was not to be molested under any circumstances."

Mrs. Carleton laughed heartily. "An able protector you have in him, surely," she said.

"I am not so sure," Mr. Carleton continued, seriously, "but that he may prove a valuable helper, if not protector. Mr. Bacon says he has almost unlimited power over his associates at the mills; is the ringleader in all their mischief; is wild, daring, and exceedingly profane. On the other hand, he is strenuously opposed to everything that will intoxicate, and prides himself on keeping his word. What little I have seen of him has convinced me that he has in him the material for a noble Christian manhood, only let the Spirit once begin the work. He will come to the Bible school next Sunday, and I am hoping it will be the beginning of better things for him, and for the Black Forge people."

"In whose class will you put him?" Mrs. Carleton asked, with interest.

“Miss Squire’s. I have already spoken to her about it; she has rare tact for holding her boys, and I trust may secure Ray’s promise to attend regularly. Let his word once be given, we shall surely have him as a permanent scholar with us.”

Later in the night Mr. Carleton was aroused by his wife’s restlessness, and asked the cause.

“I cannot get that poor woman at the Black Forge Mills out of my mind,” she replied. “To think that she should have died there without a single comfort, and with no Christian hope.”

“I meant to have told you,” her husband quickly said, “that she was a Christian, and died happily. She belonged to a Christian family in an adjoining town, and early in life made a profession of faith. She afterward married this Branford, much against the wishes of her friends, and a sad, distressing life has been hers, until her heart was completely broken by her husband’s dissipation and her children’s waywardness. But she never gave up her hope, and when this Ray came to her side yesterday she sent him for a Bible, and died repeating some of its blessed promises. The boy was really eloquent as he pictured to me that death-bed scene, and though he may not realize it, it has already made a marked impression upon him.”

With a sigh of relief Mrs. Carleton settled back upon her pillow, and was soon asleep.

For the funeral service the following morning, Mr. Carleton, since he was not to preach, selected several passages of Scripture which, read in succession, told the old story of man's sin and God's redemption through Christ; which portrayed the woe of the unbeliever in his death, and the blessed hope of all who fall asleep in Jesus. He was an impressive reader, and as God's word, without comment, fell from his lips, it doubtless went home to the hearts of those who were listening, with greater power than any mere human words could have done. In his prayer, moreover, he thanked God for the faith of the departed—a faith which had survived the most trying experiences of life, and had enabled her, even when every human comfort was wanting, to find joy and consolation in her Lord. He prayed also that the faith of the mother might now become the heritage of her erring children, and be the means which, by God's blessing, should bring eternal life to their souls. Then all that remained of that patient, long-suffering, Christian mother, was borne over to the village cemetery on the hillside, and laid to rest. Her life had been obscure to human eyes, her prayers had not been answered, and yet who would dare say of either, "He looked for fruit, and there was none." "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

Sunday morning dawned bright and beautiful. It was one of those lovely June mornings when the air is warm and balmy, when everything is green and flourishing, when the birds twitter from branch to branch or sweep down into the grass in search of food, and when all nature seems to praise God, and to invite his praise.

Ray was awakened early by one of his brothers, who said :

“Here, wake up, old fellow; pop and Jake and I are going down the bay a-fishing, and we want you to go with us.”

“Well, that’s jolly,” replied the boy, sitting up in bed. “How long before you’ll be off?”

“As soon as we can get ready; hurry up!” his brother answered.

“But, you see,” said Ray, remembering his promise now, “I can’t go.”

“Why not, I’d like to know?” asked his brother.

“Because I have promised to be at Sunday-school,” answered he, ruefully.

“That’s a good one.” And the brother sat down on the bed and laughed loud and long at the very idea of Ray’s giving up a fishing trip to go to a Sunday-school. Catching his breath finally, he suggested: “Tell the parson you hadn’t been in so long, that you forgot what day they held it.” And again he laughed at his own attempt at wit.

Provoked at his mirth, Ray sprang from the bed and began to dress himself, without saying a word. The brother, taking it for granted that the boy would soon join them for the trip, left the room. When, however, he came down to breakfast, with a clean shirt and collar on, his hair nicely combed, his clothes brushed, and his boots freshly blacked, the brother, with an oath, asked :

“Ain’t you going with us, Ray?”

“Not if I know myself,” he coolly replied ; “I have a more pressing engagement.” And as neither scorn nor threats moved him in his decision, the others finally went off without him.

As the hour approached for the morning service, Ray sought his sister-in-law, whom he in some way felt was most in sympathy with him, and said :

“Come, Betsy, go up to church and Sunday-school with me to-day. I shall feel like a fish on dry land up there alone.”

“I wish I could,” she replied, a wistful look coming into her face. “But George has gone off, and the girls never will look out for the children, so I can’t go.”

He then went to each of his sisters in turn with a similar request, but in each case met with a scornful refusal, the younger one adding :

“You got your minister off on us yesterday, and we heard Bible and praying enough then to make us blue for a week. I’d like to see myself going where he is again.”

Ray left the house and walked slowly off up town. He felt all out of humor with himself, and repeatedly said:

“Catch me making such a fool of myself again, and you’ll catch a weasel asleep.”

He reached Main Street just as the First Church bell tolled for service, and following the people in, took a seat in the gallery. He could not remember the time when he had been inside of a meeting house before, and gazed curiously around at the frescoed walls, the memorial windows, and the large organ and choir.

With the last stroke of the bell the organist struck the keyboard, and as the melodious sounds pealed forth the boy lost himself in the service. Organ and song, Scripture and prayer, and sermon, all had a charm and novelty for him, which were irresistible. Mr. Carleton had evidently brought with him to the pulpit that morning some of that power he had felt a few days before on the hilltops, and from the moment he announced his text until he had finished the discourse, Ray’s eyes were fastened upon him. When he had closed, the boy gave a sigh of satisfaction, and said to himself:

“He can preach as well as I can throw stones,” which, after all, was not so bad a compliment.

As the congregation was dismissed, Ray followed the others down the stairs and out of the vestibule, wondering how he should find his way into the schoolrooms. As he

passed out of the doors, however, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and Mr. Carleton's voice said :

“I am glad you were here this morning, Ray. If you will wait here on the steps a minute or two, I will then go with you into the school.”

As he stood there Mr. Bacon, the superintendent of the mills, and to whom he had scarcely ever spoken except in a business way, came to him, and shook hands cordially with him, saying :

“Did you enjoy the service, Ray? We are glad to have you here ; and, while I think of it, we are going to arrange for a Sunday-school and preaching service down at the Forge, and we shall look to you to help us make it a success.”

The boy, from amazement, answered not a word, but he straightened himself up an inch or two taller at the thought that “Boss” Bacon and some of the other First Church people were going to undertake an enterprise, and expected him to help. A new idea of usefulness and responsibility slowly crept into his brain.

Mr. Carleton now joined him, and together they entered the spacious and tasteful schoolrooms in the rear of the main audience room. Down one of the long aisles they went, and finally stopped by a class of lads about his own age.

“Miss Squire,” Mr. Carleton said to a dainty, fairy-like lady, in charge, “this is the new scholar I told you

about, and I trust you and he will get along so nicely together, that we may regard him as a permanent scholar." Then to Ray: "I have no class of my own, Ray, and so have decided to put you here with these boys, and this teacher. Miss Squire, Master Ray Branford." And then he passed on to the superintendent's desk.

"I am very glad to have you for a scholar," Miss Squire said, in a low, musical voice; and she laid her daintily-gloved hand in his. "Are you acquainted with these lads? If not, at the close of the school, I shall be glad to introduce you. Here, you may take this seat just in front of me, Ray."

There was something in her manner that relieved the lad of his awkwardness and embarrassment, and he took the seat she assigned him, and glanced around at the faces of his companions. There were nine besides himself, but with the exception of two they were strangers. He had only a slight acquaintance with these two, moreover, having seen them but once or twice before at the mills. One was Edward Lawton, the son of the president of the mill corporation, the other was John Bacon, the son of the mill superintendent. Their faces showed that they did not like his entrance to the class, and that they regarded him as an intruder. This fact, however, instead of disconcerting Ray, only helped him to regain his self-possession. "They don't want me evidently," he muttered to himself, "because I

work in their fathers' mill. Well, that's a big inducement to stay." And he settled back in his chair with an air that said, "I have as much right here as any of you, and I propose to maintain it."

Miss Squire had been quick to read the faces of the other lads, and knew the attitude they had assumed toward the newcomer; she had indeed expected it, and prepared herself for it. She was secretly pleased, moreover, to notice that Ray, instead of being repulsed by their attitude, was all the more determined to remain, and she now felt that she would be able to manage the situation for the good of all.

But the stroke of the bell now called the school to order, and a moment later four hundred young voices united in singing that beautiful hymn beginning:

" We come with hearts of gladness,  
Our Father and our King !  
With brows undimmed by sadness,  
Thy wondrous love to sing ;  
To crave thy Spirit's blessing  
Upon this hallowed hour,  
With grateful love confessing  
Thy wisdom and thy power."

With the second verse a tenor voice rang out so loud and clear and perfect as to attract attention even amid that chorus of voices. Miss Squire, herself a fine singer, unconsciously paused to listen to it. Mr. Carleton heard it, and silently prayed, "O Lord, use that voice in thy

service." The boys in the singer's class heard it, and the most of them were won over to his side as they listened, feeling after a boyish fashion that a fellow who could sing like that wasn't so bad, after all. But the singer, utterly unconscious of the fact that he had attracted any notice to himself, sang on with his whole heart in it, and when the hymn was finished, he exclaimed, loud enough to be heard by all the class: "My! that's worth coming up here for any day. Do you often sing such pieces as that?"

Repressing the laugh that followed by a single glance, Miss Squire answered:

"It was fine, Ray. God has given you a wonderful voice, and you should use it only for him."

The boy gave her a pleased look, and then instinctively bowed his head as he saw her do, when the prayer was offered. The reading for the day was one of David's Psalms. And the superintendent briefly spoke of this, and the circumstances under which it had been written, before they read it. Ray touched his nearest companion, and with a loud whisper, asked:

"Was it the same fellow that we are going to study about, and who killed the giant?"

Miss Squire placed her hand on his arm, saying:

"It was the same one, Ray; but wait until we begin the study of the lesson, and then ask what questions you choose."

The lesson was soon reached, and after reading the verses with her class, Miss Squire laid her Bible down on her lap, and said :

“ Now, I want each one of you to tell me something about this stripling David. John, you may commence.”

“ He was the son of Jesse,” he answered.

“ He lived at Bethlehem,” said another.

“ He kept his father’s sheep,” said a third.

“ He had been anointed by Samuel to be king over Israel,” added a fourth.

“ He was young, and he killed a giant with a stone from his sling,” said Ray, desperately ; “ that’s all I know about him, and Mr. Carleton told me that.”

A general laugh followed.

“ Boys,” said Miss Squire, earnestly, “ if any of you had lived where you never heard who was president of the United States, would you want to be laughed at for your ignorance ? Ray, unfortunately, has not been as favored as you, but he is braver than you all in one respect. He is not ashamed to let us know he is ignorant. In that very fact we have the assurance that if he has the opportunity he will not refuse to learn.”

Then noticing that Ray had neither lesson-leaf nor Bible, she handed her own Bible—an Oxford Teachers’, with flexible covers—over to him, saying :

“ Here, Ray, take this, and use it until you get another.”

“Do you mean, take that home with me?” he asked, in astonishment.

“Yes,” she replied, “if you will agree to read some in it every day, and then come here Sundays, and ask me about what you do not understand.”

Ray hesitated for a moment, but those earnest eyes looked with perfect confidence into his own, as she added :

“I know if you will only promise me that, not one of my boys here will more surely keep his word.”

Then Ray saw his mother on her bed of sickness, and heard her saying again: “I wish you would go every Sunday, Ray.” And reaching out his hand, he put it into hers, saying, “I promise.”

With a ring of gladness almost triumphant in her tones, Miss Squire went on with the lesson, and Ray could scarcely believe the hour was up when the bell rang for closing, so interested had he become in David and the great work he had accomplished. He had asked Miss Squire but one question. When she spoke of David’s faith in the Lord, he asked, quickly :

“What is faith?”

Her reply was characteristic, and happily illustrated her aptness to teach. “Ray,” she asked, “what made Mr. Carleton willing, last Thursday, to put his hat back on his head, and let you throw another stone at it when, had you missed, you might have put out his sight, or endangered his life?”

“He believed I could hit it,” answered the lad, in some confusion at the thought that she knew of his audacious prank.

“In other words, he had faith in your ability to do just as you said. And faith in God is believing that he is both able and willing to do what he has promised.”

As Miss Squire met her pastor at the six o'clock prayer and praise service, he asked :

“Well, what is your impression of the new scholar ? ”

“That he is worth saving,” she quickly replied.

“How much, with the Master's help, did you accomplish toward that end to-day ? ” he then inquired.

“I got his promise to read the Bible and to come to Sunday-school regularly,” she answered ; and, hesitatingly, “I am almost sure I helped him to see what it is to have faith in God.”

“Well done,” he said ; “and I am praying with you that the divine seed of this day may have already taken root in his heart.”

Then they parted, each hopeful of the new scholar ; and yet so short-sighted is human faith, that had either of them known where that scholar was, and what he was doing at that very hour, their hopes would have gone out in darkness.

After dinner, Ray had gone across the stream at the mills, and into the woods beyond. Putting his fingers into his mouth, he had given, in rapid succession, three

shrill whistles. In answer, a dozen or more lads of his own age had joined him. So soon as all were assembled, they formed a ring about their leader, saying :

“At thy call, chief of the Night Hawks, we come.”

“What is it you come for?” Ray asked.

“To do thy bidding, O chief,” they answered in chorus.

“Know ye the arch-traitor, Jacob Woodhull?” he asked.

Three groans followed.

“I heard him say last evening,” the leader went on, “that he should begin to pick his strawberries to-morrow.”

“Hear, hear!” cried all.

“He told Burnett, the grocer, that he would furnish him with twenty boxes to-morrow night, and the Night Hawks of Black Forge must see that he breaks his word.”

“Hurrah! hurrah!” all cried, with a smacking of lips.

“Those who want a feast, follow me!” Ray cried, and started off through the woods, his companions following close behind.

A half mile's walk brought them to a small clearing containing a cabin, barn, crib, and other out-buildings, owned by Jacob Woodhull, an eccentric but kind-hearted farmer. He made a specialty of small fruits on his little farm, finding a ready market for them in the neighboring village; and, as he had no family, he thus made a comfortable support for himself. For no good reason

the boys at the Black Forge Mills had taken a dislike to the man, and frequently annoyed him by pilfering his fruits, tearing down his fences, and destroying his crops.

At a signal from Ray, the squad came to a halt just on the edge of the woods, and then he said :

“We'll have to wait awhile, boys. The berries are just back of the barn, but old Woodhull is in the house. By-and-by he will come out of the house to do his chores, before going up town to the evening service. He'll go into that crib yonder for grain, and I'll slip up and shut him in. Then we can pick the berries at our leisure, without fear of being disturbed. When we get all we want, we'll let the old fellow out—but hardly in time for him to go up to the meeting to-night.”

“Hurrah for our chief!” the boys cried, in a suppressed whisper.

An hour or so later, the door of the house opened, and Mr. Woodhull, with no thought of the base trick about to be played upon him, came forth. He had a pail in his hand, and went down to the spring just back of the cabin for water.

“He'll go to the crib next,” Ray whispered to his companions. “You fellows keep quiet until I have shut him in.” And keeping the barn between himself and the house, he ran for the crib. Crouching down behind it, he waited.

Five minutes after Mr. Woodhull again appeared, coming directly, as the boy had predicted, for the granary. Unlocking it, he entered, and began to fill a measure with meal. Before he had accomplished his task, however, the door, to his astonishment, was swung to and fastened; then he heard footsteps hastening away. Soon after he heard many voices out by the barn, and it at once flashed upon him that a raid was being made by the factory boys upon his berries. He tried to force open the door, but it resisted every effort. He looked out of a crevice, but the barn was between him and the thieves, and he could not see them. He hallooed, but got only laughter and derision for an answer. The sun had set, and darkness was fast falling, before his release came, and even then he got out of the building only in time to see a dark form escaping to the woods.

Lighting a lantern, he hurried out to his strawberry bed, to find the plants and unripe berries uninjured, but every ripe berry picked as clean as if he had done it himself.

“It is that Ray Branford and his crew!” he ejaculated, wrathfully. “I know it as well as if I’d seen ’em; but it is another thing to prove it.”

The story reached Mr. Carleton and Miss Squire before another Sunday, and, as they talked it over, they said: “How confident we were that he was already impressed with a desire to do better! and yet, if it was he, no good

impression can have been made upon him, and he is as far from the kingdom as ever."

But they only made another mistake, and revealed how little they knew of God's way of working, after all; for the Holy Spirit was already striving with that boy, and was leading him surely toward the kingdom. But the devil never yet gave up a soul without a struggle, and that thieving exploit was one of his wiles to drown out the Spirit's pleadings, and, if possible, to tighten his own hold upon the boy's soul. He, like many of his followers, grows more and more desperate when he finds he is losing his power.

## CHAPTER III.

### ONE NIGHT'S WORK.

ON a cold, stormy day, six months later, Mr. Carleton sat at his study table, his head bowed upon his hands his whole attitude that of dejectedness, if not of grief. What was the matter?

Has it ever occurred to you, dear reader, that ministers are human, just as other men, and that when the visible results of their labors are not as great as they have hoped for and looked for and prayed for, they sometimes lose faith in themselves and their people, and, alas! too often in God? When this time comes, to whom shall the pastor turn for consolation? His people must never see the despondency of his heart, his poor wife has more than her share of burdens already; and so there is but one thing he can do: shut himself in his study and lay his burdens upon God.

Things he would readily see were he trying to comfort others are hid from his eyes; promises so rich and full and sure when recalled to console others have an empty sound to his ears; faith strong and steadfast when he has been striving to cheer other hearts has grown feeble in his own soul. This, too, many times when there is not

the slightest need of it. God is really leading and blessing the work done for him; but it is in his way, and not in man's way—and there is where the trouble lies.

This was the only trouble with Mr. Carleton now. He had arranged for so much and expected so much, along certain lines and in certain ways, that, now it had not come, he at once jumped to the conclusion that God was not honoring his ministry at all. Through his lack of faith he failed to see that the Lord in his own way was accomplishing a work infinitely beyond that which *he* had expected.

First of all, there was the Black Forge Mission, for that had really been established. Some months before Mr. Bacon had called on him, announcing in his off-hand way the good news:

“Well, pastor, our directors have decided to fit up a room down at the mills for a chapel, and offer it, rent free, to the First Church people as long as they care to sustain a Sunday-school and religious services on that field.”

It was a nice room, too, large and well adapted to its purpose. One-half of a large storehouse on the main street had been partitioned off, making a room forty by sixty feet. This had been plastered and frescoed, a belfry put on the roof with its bell, and a library room arranged beside the entrance, while four large windows on each side gave ample light.

Then the First Church people had furnished the room tastefully and comfortably. There were four rows of nice settees, a platform and desk with its large Bible, Scripture mottoes on the walls, books to fill the library shelves, and a Bible and singing book for each scholar. When the fall months came, two good stoves were added, and thus the room was made warm and attractive for all.

The school had been successful, too, from the outset ; for there were nearly two hundred scholars on the roll, with an average attendance of an hundred and fifty. The preaching services and prayer meetings had not been as well attended, it is true, nor had there been any indication that souls were anxious to find Jesus. But there was nothing strange in this. How long have some of our missionaries toiled on their fields before there was any indication of the Spirit's convicting power? Not months, but years. The conditions we are considering were little different. Black Forge Mills, when the mission was first established, was morally as dark as were some of those heathen lands. Still, had Mr. Carleton taken the trouble to have questioned Mr. Bacon even, he would have learned that there was less drunkenness and brawling and Sabbath-breaking among that people now than six months before, and had he only watched the children as he went among them, he would have noticed that they were less rude ; and he knew, had he only taken the trouble to recall the fact, that he was much more wel-

come than at first in those Black Forge homes. God's work was surely being accomplished among that people: the faithful seed-sowing in the Sunday-school and from the pulpit was not to return unto the Master void.

Then there was Ray Branford. How Mr. Carleton and Miss Squire had labored and prayed for his conversion! He had kept his promise. Each Sunday had seen him in his place. He had each week reported to his teacher his readings, and had astonished her with both his questions and his answers. Sometimes she had been obliged to confess her own ignorance, as his thoughtful and far-reaching interrogations were propounded, and had been obliged to refer him to Mr. Carleton himself. They all noticed, too, the boy's improvement in appearance and morals. Less complaint came to them now than formerly of his mischievous pranks and petty pilferings. He came and went among them as one whose place was assured. He had in many ways been a help to them at the mission chapel, and his influence had been heartily given for the suppression of all disorder in their services whenever it seemed likely to occur. But more than this could not be said of him. His conversion seemed as far off as ever, and while attached to Mr. Carleton and his teacher, he in no way indicated a desire to know more intimately their Master and their Lord.

Still, had not the changes in the lad been very great—as great perhaps as they could reasonably expect? There

were many scholars in the First Church school better favored than this poor lad, and with the best of home influences, and yet there had not been so marked changes in them as in him. Why be discouraged? Rather, why not be profoundly encouraged at the sure manifestations of God's presence with that boy? Now, Mr. Carleton, sensible fellow that he was, knew all this, and had it been any one but himself who was so dejected, he would have thought of it, and with triumph manifest in his tones, he would have called their attention to it, and with them have thanked God for it. As it was, he just bowed there on his hands troubled in spirit, and cried out, "How long, Lord? Wilt thou hide thyself forever?"

He arose after a time and went to the window, looking out upon the rain as it drove itself heavily against the panes.

"Here it is the night for our prayer meeting, and I'd like to know how many will be out in such a storm as this," he muttered, half aloud. "A mere handful in that little back room, when I was counting on so great a number."

"In other words, Rev. Ralph Carleton thinks he could have arranged the weather better than his Lord, and because it does not suit him he must needs find fault, and be woefully put out about it," said a voice behind him.

He turned and looked gravely at his wife, who had

entered in time to hear his complaint, and who now looked up, half amused and half seriously, into his face.

"The rebuke was needed, Mary," he at last said, "and may the dear Master forgive my want of faith." Then drawing her down on the lounge beside him, he poured into her sympathizing ears the whole story of his dejectedness. She listened attentively until he had finished, and then, with mirth dancing in her eyes, though her words were grave enough, repeated almost his own utterances to one of his members the evening before. With his own gesture and emphasis, she pointed out the success of the mission, the great changes in Ray Branford, and other marked evidences of God's blessing upon the home church, and closed with the words, "Physician, heal thyself."

He heard her through without a comment; then, dropping on his knees, he drew her down beside him, and begged God's forgiveness for his want of courage and faith, for his desire to have things his own, and not God's way, and thanked him for the true helper and sympathizer he had given him in his wife. He prayed that there might be given to them both fuller grace, greater power, and more submissive wills to toil on God's time and in God's way for the extension of his kingdom on the earth. He arose from his knees, saying, "There, Mary, I will go back to my work, and even if I have

but one out to-night besides myself, they shall have the best spiritual food I can give them."

The storm increased rather than diminished in violence as night came on, and when Mr. Carleton and his wife entered the church, they found that the sexton had lighted and heated only the small room. But this was large enough to hold the bare dozen who had braved the storm for that hour of prayer. Two of the deacons and their wives, three young ladies who had recently joined the church, the sexton and his wife, with Mr. and Mrs. Carleton made eleven. Who was the twelfth? Will you believe it? It was Ray Branford. Never before had he attended a Friday night prayer meeting at the First Church; and now to be out in all that storm! It seemed easy enough to account for it, when he explained to Mr. Carleton, as he shook hands with him, that a neighbor had been taken suddenly sick and he had come up for the doctor. The doctor wasn't at home, and wouldn't be for an hour; and as he was going to ride back with him to the Forge, he thought he might as well come in to the prayer meeting and wait there, as over at the doctor's office. This was the *human* explanation of it; but up there in heaven they would have told you it was a *providence* of God.

Mr. Carleton was very informal in that service. He took his chair right down near his little audience, and opening his Bible he read a few verses from the forty-

third chapter of Isaiah, and then called on Deacon Blake to pray. This good brother was one of those who are so rare, who know how to come directly to God and tell him just what they need. When he had done that, he stopped. It was a very brief prayer, almost as brief as that of Bartimeus when he asked the Lord for sight; but all of that little company felt they had been lifted right into God's presence, and that he knew, and would give them just what they needed most. Then they sang a familiar hymn, after which Mr. Carleton, still sitting in his chair, gave them a brief talk.

"There is one verse here in this passage I have read," he remarked, "that I want you all to notice. ('Fear not: for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name: thou art mine.') This, of course, applies first to God's chosen people Israel; but secondly, to the spiritual Israel, and thus to each child of God. Every one of us here to-night, if he belongs to Christ, can claim the words.

"The child of God is admonished to fear not—to let nothing trouble him—neither life's trials nor death itself. He of all men should have no cause for alarm. The reason for this is threefold. God has redeemed him; has called him by name; has declared, 'Thou art mine.' This is not a mere repetition of thought. There is a gradation and a climax. To be called by name is more than mere redemption; to have it declared that 'thou

art God's is more than the calling by name. There are three steps, and they are progressive—first, redemption, then intimacy, and last, identity; for Christ and his disciple are one.”

Then briefly, but pointedly, Mr. Carleton proceeded to illustrate the three steps—redemption through Christ, intimacy with Christ, and identity with him. He closed by quoting the words: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne,” and added, “When the disciple has placed himself in complete submission to the will of God, as did our blessed Master, then is this last stage reached—namely, his complete identification with his Lord.”

From the moment that Mr. Carleton read the Scripture lesson Ray Branford seemed unusually agitated, and before he had finished his remarks great tears were flowing down the boy's cheeks. When, however, he at the close of the meeting hastened to the lad's side with the anxious inquiry: “What is it, Ray? Can I help you?” the boy hastily brushed away his tears, and brusquely replied: “Those were the words my mother repeated when dying.” Then he turned, and fled out into the storm and darkness.

This, then, was the cause for his great agitation, and with a shade of disappointment apparent on his face, Mr. Carleton turned around to speak with Deacon Blake.

“Brother Carleton,” said that wise old gentleman, “don’t you know that the Lord can go with that boy in all this storm and darkness, and save him, too?” And he did.

“Dr. Gasque, what is it to be a Christian?” Ray asked, as he got into that gentleman’s buggy, and they rode off together toward the Black Forge Mills.

Now it happened that Dr. Gasque, though a very skillful physician, and one who prided himself on his strict morality, was not a Christian. He was not even a church-goer. But he knew Ray’s history well, and realized that the boy to ask such a question must be thoroughly in earnest. Under the circumstances, then, he probably did what was the very best thing to do, for he answered: “I don’t know.”

“Well,” said the boy, “if there is anything in Christianity at all, ought not a man who is constantly with those who are passing into eternity to know something about it himself, that he might tell others of it?”

The question, startling as it was to the doctor, was characteristic of the lad. For some months he had manifested a similar directness in his questions to his teacher, and to Mr. Carleton. A long silence followed, and the lights at the Forge were in sight before the doctor answered; but he at last said: “I suppose he had.”

“How would you settle such a question?” persisted the boy.

There came to the doctor a bright vision of a home among the New Hampshire hills, and a white-haired father and mother praying for their only son, and he answered, huskily: "I should go directly to Christ himself."

"Thank you!" Ray said, as he leaped out of the buggy, and hastened home. Going directly to his room, he closed and locked the door. Then he knelt down by his bedside, repeating over and over again the words: "Lord Jesus, take me. Lord Jesus, take me."

After a while he rose from his knees, lighted the lamp, took his Bible from the old chest in which he kept it, and turned over its pages. He was quite familiar with them now, and soon found what he wanted. "Him that cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out." "That means Ray Branford, just as much as any one else," he commented. He now turned to the story of the Philipian jailer, and read Paul's direction to him: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "If that was sound advice then, it is sound advice now," he said. "And Miss Squire says faith is just to believe God is both able and willing to do as he promises." He closed the book with a quick snap, and again knelt by the bedside. "Lord Jesus, I come to thee, and I believe thou canst and that thou wilt save me now," he prayed. He said it as plainly and simply as he might have asked a friend for a book; or, as a child might come to its

mother for a glass of water. Then he rose from his knees, and prepared for bed with the air of one who had gotten just what he had asked for. It was a very simple affair, after all; but angels had witnessed the scene, a new name had been written down upon the Book of Life, and all heaven was moved with joy. For is it not written, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth"?

## CHAPTER IV.

### RAY'S CONFESSION OF CHRIST.

THE First Church bell tolled loudly for the six o'clock prayer and praise service the next Sunday evening. As the last stroke sounded Mr. Carleton came rapidly in, and took his place at the desk in the main lecture room, looking down with cheerful face at the large congregation before him. How full the room was! Not only the usual attendants, but such a number of unaccustomed ones were there. In the very first seat at the right of the centre aisle sat Ray Branford, and beside him his sister-in-law. In the very first seat on the left was Dr. Gasque and his wife. Back near the door was young Harry Gasque, the dissipated son of the doctor, with quite a crowd of his immediate associates. Then scattered here and there were many of the young people from the Black Forge Mills. Mr. Carleton's heart rejoiced to see them all, and he said to himself, "The cold ice of indifference which has so long surrounded us is surely yielding; now may it melt entirely away under the warm influence of God's love."

He had a way of conducting that hour of service that was peculiarly his own. From the moment he entered

the desk he never sat down, but with song book in hand, and Bible in easy reach, he stood marshaling his people throughout the service as a general might marshal his forces. "We will sing 'The light of the World is Jesus,'" he said; and the organist struck the first notes. Then the room rang with a chorus of voices. When three verses of that hymn had been sung, he announced another familiar one, and then another, until fifteen minutes had been spent in singing the praise of God. Scarcely had the last note of the last hymn ended, when a short prayer followed, direct, simple, as though it were conversation with one close at hand, and ready to grant every request. A short Scripture lesson was then impressively read, and another hymn sung. Twenty minutes of the hour was now used. "Now let us have a few brief prayers," he suggested; "who will be the first to lead our thoughts upward to the throne?" One after another the brethren knelt, until twelve short fervent supplications had been offered, amid a stillness which was almost oppressive. Then another hymn was sung, and the pastor announced: "We now have twenty minutes for testimony. Who will be the first to speak of God's love?"

Ray Branford, to the amazement of all, was the first to speak. "I want to tell you to-night," he said, "that I love Jesus. He has forgiven me my sins, and I have consecrated my life to him. Will you pray that in all

my discouraging surroundings I may never once dishonor his name? ”

The hushed silence that followed was broken by the voice of Dr. Gasque. Stepping to the front of the desk, he turned around and faced the congregation, saying: “My friends, you all know me. You know how for years I have lived among you an ungodly and self-righteous man. I had a Christian father and mother, and for years they prayed for their only son, but he was unsaved. God gave me a dear Christian wife, and I saw before me daily the proofs of Christ’s redeeming and sanctifying power; but I still closed my eyes to the truth, and refused to believe. But last Friday evening that boy,” pointing to Ray Branford, “asked me a question that broke through the armor of my unbelief and pierced me to the heart. He, as some of you may know, came up to the town after me for a sick neighbor. Not finding me at home, he dropped into your prayer meeting here to pass away the hour until I came. Here words were spoken which God used to touch his heart. He came out from this house stirred to his very soul and got into my buggy, and together we rode toward the Forge.

“‘Dr. Gasque, what is it to be a Christian?’ he suddenly asked me. I saw he was thoroughly in earnest, and I dared not counsel him wrongly. ‘Suppose it was your own boy asking that question?’ rang in my ears. I was compelled to be honest, and replied, ‘I do not know.’

“His next question staggered me, it was so unexpected. ‘If there is anything in Christianity at all,’ he asked, ‘ought not a man who is constantly with those who are passing into eternity to know something about it himself that he might tell others?’ I saw myself and my responsibility to God as never before, and for a time I knew not what to answer. At length I said, condemning myself thereby, ‘I suppose he ought.’ But the boy had another question ready. ‘How would you settle such a question?’ he inquired. I thought of my old father’s words, and replied: ‘I would go directly to Jesus.’ Then we parted, but as I bent over the sick man I had been called to see, and realized that no human power could save him, the boy’s question came back to me with renewed force. I drove home, but it never left me. I entered my room, but it was with me still. I saw I was a sinner, hopelessly lost without the mercy of Christ. I awoke my wife. I asked her to pray for me, and kneeling there by her side I found peace. I, too, confess here to-night, that I love Christ, and have consecrated my life to him. Pray for me.”

Those who have witnessed similar scenes will readily understand the spirit of that meeting for the rest of the hour. Mrs. Gasque arose and repeated the divine words: “It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” Then another and another followed until the tolling bell

indicated that it was time for the evening preaching service.

"I cannot help feeling that there may be some one here to-night," said Mr. Carleton, in closing, "who may desire Jesus for their friend. If so, will you rise upon your feet. Immediately Ray Branford's sister-in-law arose, saying, briefly: "I want to be a Christian." Was that all? No; away back near the door a young man arose, and in a clear ringing voice, he said: "To-night I believe in a Saviour; to-night for the first time in my life I desire to be a Christian. I have been wild and dissolute and wicked. Is there hope for such a one as I am?" It was Harry Gasque, and the appealing look upon his face touched all who beheld it.

Then Mr. Carleton took those two convicted souls to the mercy seat. Tenderly, lovingly he presented their cases, and asked that for Jesus' sake they might now be forgiven. What if the church bell was tolling for the next service: these two sin-convicted souls hung in the balance, and until they found life he must wrestle with God. Finally they arose from their knees, and the congregation was dismissed, but the son could lay his hand in that of his father and confidently affirm, "Your Saviour is my Saviour too," while the longing, wistful look had left the tear-stained face of the penitent woman, and in its place there had come one of perfect peace.

Of course, that night's incidents were talked about.

All Afton was busy with them for the next few days. And just here a strange perverseness of human nature cropped out. There was Doctor Gasque, a man who had not been inside of a meeting house for years; who had been an acknowledged skeptic; who on his own confession had been exceedingly self-righteous; and there was his son Harry, wild, dissolute, and dissipated; yet no one doubted their conversion. "It is so wonderful," they said. "I am so glad for Mrs. Gasque." "What Christians they will make!" "What a help to the First Church!" "What influence they will have!"—and a dozen other equally pleased expressions passed from lip to lip. Nor would I for one moment say they were undeserved. But the Branfords! Well, there were Mr. Carleton and Miss Squire, and old Deacon Blake, and Mr. Bacon and others, who believed that their conversion was real, and hailed with delight what they believed to be an indication that the reformation of the Black Forge people was at hand. There were others, however, good church people, too, who shrugged their shoulders when Ray and his sister-in-law were mentioned, and said: "I presume we must receive them into the church, of course; but they'll never be any help to us, and very likely they will have to be disciplined before a great while." Others shook their heads forebodingly, saying: "If I were Mr. Carleton, I should wait awhile before I was so sure that those Branfords were converted: they are a hard set."

Then there were others who shook out the folds of their silks, and said, complacently :

“ Really, I don’t know what the First Church is coming to. Mr. Grundy and I don’t propose to mix with the Black Forge people. We haven’t been accustomed to associate with such people, and if the First Church insists on that rabble coming in, we shall take our letters to the Central Church. Dr. Lightfoot is as fine a preacher as Mr. Carleton, and the people there are so much more select.”

Don’t think, dear reader, I have exaggerated this thing at all. For a good many years I have been a church member, and acquainted with nearly every phase of Christian work ; and I assert, without fear of contradiction, that there is in many of our churches a spirit which seeks after those who may be a financial and social help to the church, while the masses are either neglected or looked upon with disfavor. “ Many Christians still need a special vision and a voice from heaven, saying : “ What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common,” before they can understand that “ God is no respecter of persons.”

In the case of Ray Branford, however it may be elsewhere, these things I have written were actually said. It is a veritable history I am writing. Did Ray know of these things? Yes; there are always some in a community who feel called upon to report to those concerned

all they hear about them. Did this drive Ray away from the First Church? No; and for two reasons. There were two traits in his character which enabled him to rise above the most exasperating things said about him. First, he felt so exceedingly unworthy of the gift of salvation, and was so amazed at its bestowment upon him, that he did not wonder that others doubted that he had really received it. Then, too, he had in his make-up a bit of that obstinacy which, when he knew what his duty was, led him, like Luther, to do it, though a thousand popes stood in the way. But this combination of traits is exceedingly rare; and what proved to be an incentive to him has deterred many another from doing what was known to be duty.

The actual result from this display of human prejudice was not, however, so disastrous in other respects as might have been anticipated. Satan sometimes overreaches himself, and it proved to be so in this instance. The sudden manifestation of God's grace on that memorable evening did not as suddenly depart. Rather it increased in power. It pervaded the Sunday-school; it entered the homes of the congregation; it even extended to the Black Forge Mission; and before spring came, more than a hundred had confessed Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Early in the new year, Ray Branford and others appeared before the First Church committee as candidates for admission to the church. That committee was

composed of wise and judicious men—men who loved Christ with all their hearts, and were anxious that all who would might come unto him. They felt, as Ray related his experience, that he gave unmistakable evidence of the Spirit's work in his heart; and without the slightest hesitation they recommended him to the church as one worthy of a place in its membership. When this became known, the tongues of the gossips were again set in motion, and rumor soon had it that, at the preparatory service, opposition would be made to his reception. This was enough to fill the main lecture room to overflowing when that evening came.

Ray's relation of his experience was clear, and to the unprejudiced, convincing; but when he had retired, and opportunity was given for remark, a brother rose, and said:

"I do not want it understood, brethren, that I actually object to this lad, or deny that he is a Christian; but he is young, his surroundings are all against him, and I question whether we had not better wait awhile before we receive him. If he is truly a Christian, it won't make any difference; if he is not, it will be a great deal better to wait." Then he sat down.

Mr. Carleton sprang to his feet.

"Will the brother give his Scriptural authority for such a course?" he asked.

There was an ominous silence.

“I insist upon it,” Mr. Carleton said; “let the brother tell us where in all of God’s word he gets his authority for his position. I admit this boy’s life has not been all we could wish; I admit his surroundings are all evil. But to my mind that furnishes all the greater reason why this church, if satisfied he has been redeemed, should throw around him her love, her protection, and her care.”

“Why,” stammered the brother, “I don’t know as there is any Scripture that bears on the case, but I think there are times when we should be cautious in receiving members for the good name of the church, and that no reproach be cast upon the cause of Christ.”

“We should always exercise proper caution in coming to a decision as to one’s regeneration,” said the pastor; “but once satisfied that a person is regenerated, there is but one course open to us, and that is, to receive him and help him in the new life he has begun. Brother Bacon, you see more of this lad than the rest of us; do you think his life gives evidence of his conversion?”

Mr. Bacon arose, and said:

“I have watched him closely from the night he stood and confessed his Saviour. I do see every evidence of a change in him. For my own part, I have no hesitancy, as one of the examining committee, in recommending him to this church as a suitable candidate for baptism.”

“Is there any one else who can throw any light on this subject?” asked Mr. Carleton.

The tall, lank form of Jacob Woodhull slowly rose. Though a very eccentric man, he had been for years a member of the church, and a constant attendant upon its services, but seldom took part in its deliberations. His rising then filled all with surprise.

“Brethren,” he said, “I was here the night that boy first spoke for Jesus. I went out from that meeting and talked as hard against him as any one. You see it has always been a notion of mine that a repentant person should go back to the very beginning of his evil course, and repair so far as possible the injuries he may have done. If I understand the Bible it teaches this. So I argued, if this boy is really changed, he’ll own up to me some of those rascally scrapes he’s been in, down at my farm. I kept my notion to myself, but I just talked against the boy, and I said it will take a powerful sight to make me believe he is converted. You see I kinder doubted Christ’s power in saving such a lad—not that I meant to; but that’s what it amounted to, all the same.

“Well, the very next night, as I was doing my chores, who should come to my house but this Ray Branford. ‘I want to see you on business, Mr. Woodhull,’ he said. ‘Well, here I am,’ I answered, gruffly. ‘Do you remember how, one fall, some one stole your watermelons?’ he asked. ‘Yes,’ said I, kinder getting an idea of what he was driving at. ‘And your strawberries, and apples, and

pears,' he goes on, naming the times. 'Yes,' answered I, shortly. 'How much,' inquired he, 'would pay you for them all?' I thought it over, and to test his repentance, I put it just as high as I could. 'About twenty-five dollars,' I answered. Would you believe it, that youngster took out a roll of bills, and said, 'Here, Mr. Woodhull, is fifteen dollars that I have been saving to get me some clothes with; but I will give you that now, and I will pay you the other ten as soon as I can save it. Will you forgive me?' My brethren, you could have knocked me down with a feather then, so to speak. I never was so ashamed in my life. I shook hands with him, but I took the money, and I have taken the other ten. Perhaps you think I was hard on him, so I'll just say that boy isn't going to lose anything by it.

"After he had gone I went into the house and opened the Bible, and read about Zaccheus. Then I said, 'There, Jacob Woodhull, you and some other folks are like those self-righteous citizens of Jericho. You have wondered why the Lord wanted to go down to that Branford house and stop with such miserable sinners. Meanwhile, that boy, just like Zaccheus, has stood and said, 'Lord, if I have taken anything from any man, I restore him four-fold,' for I reckon he has just about settled with me in that proportion. And all the time the Master was saying, 'This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.' I guess, brethren,

what the Lord has cleansed, we better not call either common or unclean."

Amid an impressive silence he sat down, and a unanimous vote was cast for the lad's acceptance.

Nor did the First Church people ever have cause to regret that vote; indeed, in after years they were accustomed to allude to that hour, and with pardonable pride assert, "Among all we have received into this church, no one has given more marked evidence of conversion than has Ray Branford, or that the Divine voice said unto him, 'Fear not; for I have redeemed thee.'"

## CHAPTER V.

### OLD TIES SEVERED.

THE month of March opened cold and stormy. All day long the rain and sleet had fallen unceasingly. As night approached there was no cessation of the storm; it had rather increased. During the evening the wind veered. The cold was growing more and more intense. The clouds lowered darkly, and prematurely hid the day, while they poured their watery contents down in sweeping floods.

It was the evening for the weekly prayer meeting at the First Church, and Ray Branford put on his coat, and prepared himself to face the storm.

"Are you going up to the church to-night?" his sister-in-law asked, in surprise.

"Yes; I haven't missed a prayer meeting yet; I am well and strong, and I see no reason why I shouldn't go to-night," he replied.

"I wish you wouldn't go, Ray," Betsy said. "I'm all alone with the children, and it is so stormy. I thought perhaps you'd stay and read to me."

Ray glanced at the clock. "I can wait a half hour, and then get there in time for the meeting; what shall I read?"

"Oh, select some chapter full of comfort," she answered, "for I'm just about discouraged. I believe George delights to do everything he can to try me since I became a Christian. He spends more time at the saloon, and don't help me near as much with the children. You know just how father has gone on since mother died; there is hardly a day he has been sober. The girls, too, say the most provoking things they can think of. I tell you, Ray, I find it pretty hard to do just as Jesus wants me to all the time. I wonder, sometimes, how you bear it all so patiently; you never seem to get discouraged."

"Yes I do," he quickly replied. "I find it hard among these old associations to keep from sin. The boys try every way to make me mad, and they have succeeded more than once. Only the other day I knocked John Gardiner down for calling me names, and to-day I almost swore at Ned Clark for breaking the yarns on my jack. The oath got clear to my teeth, and I shut it off with such force, it almost took my breath away. And you know just how father and the boys treat me. Not a week passes that they don't curse me for what they call my oddities. I tell you, Betsy, it's as hard for me as for you to show the spirit of Jesus at all times. I sometimes think, 'Has this got to be always?' I want to do something besides spin all my life. I wish I could get an education; I want to fit myself for Christ's work." And the boy sighed heavily.

These two, since their conversion, had, as often as possible, read the Bible and prayed together, but never before had Ray spoken of the longings of his heart. Betsy looked up in quick sympathy with him, saying:

“I wish you might become a preacher; wouldn’t it be grand?”

“Yes; and I do feel called to that very work. I felt it at times before I even accepted Jesus. I mean to obey the call, too, just as fast as Jesus will show me the way.”

He now opened his Bible and read the ninety-first Psalm; then knelt and offered a brief prayer, the burden of which was that he and his sister-in-law might never be discouraged, but, sure of the Master’s presence and help, might ever walk in the path of known duty. After this, he started for up town.

It was a cold and dreary walk. The rain had turned to snow or fine sleet, which the wind blew furiously, driving it with blinding force into his face, and but for the street lamps he would have lost his way. He arrived at the church wet and cold, and well-nigh out of breath, to find but a bare half dozen besides the pastor. Even he seemed surprised to see the boy on such a night, and so expressed himself as he shook hands with him.

“I had no good excuse for not coming,” the lad answered, simply.

Mr. Carleton smiled as he looked down into that earnest face, and said: “There are a good many nearer

the meeting house than you, who have evidently regarded this storm as sufficient excuse for not coming." Then to himself: "God surely has not bestowed such an unflinching regard for duty upon this lad without having some special work for him to do; he must be helped to something better than running a jack in the Black Forge Mills." But he little knew how that little prayer meeting, even as one a few months before, was, by the blessing of God, going to become an important factor in changing the whole current of the lad's life.

He read the sixth chapter of Second Corinthians for the Scripture lesson of the evening, and talked briefly upon the words of the seventeenth verse: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

"Paul, in this chapter," he said, "is showing the Corinthian Christians that there is no fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness, or between the believer and the unbeliever. The Christian cannot contract worldly friendships, nor enter into any connection with unbelievers which requires much familiar intercourse, lest he be tempted to join with the unbeliever in his wicked principles and practices. As the privileges conferred upon the Jews obliged them to withhold themselves from all heathen intercourse, and from the pollution of every unclean thing, so, the apostle argues, the followers of Christ, on account of the special favors

and blessings they have received, are much more under obligations to keep themselves separate from all impure associations and unholy practices. He then, to enforce his argument, quoted these words: 'Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.'"

Ray listened attentively to Mr. Carleton's remarks. He always did. But what he carried away from that prayer room was the divine command: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." The words rang in his ears. They went home with him. They even followed him into the mill. He could not shake them off. He read them over and over again. He prayed over them. They had but one meaning to him. He gave them the most literal interpretation. He must leave his old associations, he must abandon his old life, he must sever the old ties; and he was fully persuaded that only thus could he secure the highest spiritual development, and prepare himself for the work of God.

He talked the matter over with Betsy a few evenings later. But she, with a puzzled look upon her face, finally asked: "If those words mean what you say they do, what is my duty? Am I to take the children, and leave here too? How in the world am I to care for them if I do?"

“Don’t you see, Betsy,” Ray answered, eagerly, “those words may mean more to me than to you? You have ties; you had them before your conversion, and you cannot break them without wrong to others. The words mean to you to come out and be separate from all in your surroundings that will hinder your fidelity to the Saviour. But those things you can do and still honor Jesus, you have a right—nay, it is your duty to do. The words mean the same to me, but in my case may have a wider bearing than in yours. I can leave home, I can leave the mill, I can sever the old life, and instead of neglecting any duty, I shall be placing myself where I can do far more for the Master. I feel he is calling me to a higher work. I am sure that in my present life and surroundings there is little if any opportunity to prepare myself for obeying that call. I must seek some other work. I must find some way wherein I can carry out the Master’s wishes.”

“Why don’t you go and talk with Mr. Carleton about it?” inquired Betsy.

“I would, but he might think I was asking for help; then, too, what may seem plain duty to me may not seem so to him. When my life and my growth in grace and knowledge of Jesus are such as to lead him to believe I am called to the Master’s work, I will tell him freely of my convictions. So far I have confessed them only to you. For the present I must fight out the battle alone.

All I can do is wait, watch, and pray for God to open up the way for me. He knows I am willing to walk in any path he may mark out for me. In his own time he will show me what he would have me to do."

Several weeks passed away. Ray patiently did the work before him, but the conviction grew stronger and stronger in his heart that his mill life was drawing to a close; that before a great while the Lord would throw open a door through which he might go on toward his most cherished hopes. And, as is often the case in God's dealings with us, it was opened so unexpectedly, and so naturally and simply, that only those who recognize God's hand in everything would have seen his hand in it at all.

There came a warm bright Sunday in April. The snow had left the hills; the grass was starting up fresh and green; the trees were showing their tiny buds; here and there in some sheltered nook an early flower had ventured to open its bright face, as a harbinger of others to come.

Ray had been to church and Sunday-school as usual, and now, dinner having been eaten, he stood on the door-steps looking off toward the hills. "I am in the mood to-day for a tramp," he said, "and it is a long time since I went up to the top of Pine Hill. I guess I'll take a walk up there, and come down the other way in time for the evening service." So calling out to Betsy that he

would meet her at the church at the hour for service, he started off on his long tramp.

The path wound around the edge of the hill, and soon ran along a precipice just above the highway. He sat down here and looked off toward the mills, his thoughts busy with the changes of the past year. He was soon lost in his reverie, and took no note of what was passing around him until aroused by the sound of an approaching wagon. He looked down, and saw a pair of horses and a light wagon in which were two men passing directly beneath him. One of the men was Jacob Woodhull and the other was his nephew, George Woodhull, who owned a large farm down on the east shore of the bay. Ray remembered now that Jacob Woodhull had not been at church or Sunday-school that morning, and thought: "He has been down to his nephew's to-day, and is just coming home."

The men were busy talking, and did not notice the boy a hundred feet or so above. "I tell you, George," Mr. Jacob Woodhull was saying to his companion, "this boy will just suit you; I will guarantee that he is thoroughly reliable, and I think he will be glad to leave the mill. Anyway, we can ——" And the rest of the sentence was lost by the horses breaking into a fast trot, and soon disappearing around a sharp turn in the road.

Ray rose and went on, his mind busy with what he had overheard. "My!" he ejaculated, "I wonder if they

meant me. Wouldn't I just like to work for George Woodhull. I can assure them I am ready to leave the mill any time to go there."

He reached the summit of the hill, and for a time gazed around in delight on the landscape presented to his view. He felt that the scene had never seemed half so beautiful before. He forgot that the change was more within himself than in the outer world. There had been in him a growth that he scarcely realized. His spiritual eyes were opened. He saw beauty where he had never seen it before, because he discerned in all things now the finger prints of God.

His eye finally rested upon the east shore of the bay, and he readily picked out from among the others the farm he knew was Mr. George Woodhull's. This brought to his mind again the conversation he had heard, and falling there upon his knees he prayed that if God so willed he might find an opening out from the old life just here.

He was scarcely surprised, then, when Mr. Jacob Woodhull joined him at the close of the evening service, and, as they walked on together, asked :

"Ray, have you ever felt like giving up your mill life for something better?"

"Yes, sir," he promptly replied. "Just as soon as God gives me the opportunity."

"You know my nephew, George Woodhull, who owns

the big farm down on the east shore, don't you?" his companion then asked.

"I know him by sight," admitted Ray, "though I never spoke with him that I remember of."

"Well," continued Mr. Woodhull, "he came up after me this morning—had an awful sick cow, and wanted me to doctor it; that's the reason I wasn't at church;—and I find he wants to get a young fellow he can trust to come on his place this summer. He's going into the stock business, and will be away a good deal. He wants some one to look out for the stock, and around the house; to be company and protection for Mrs. Woodhull when he's away. There are two other men to attend to the farmwork, so the place won't be so awful hard for the one who gets it. I kinder recommended you. You see, George and his wife are earnest Christians, members of a little church down near their place. Then he has lots of books, and Mrs. Woodhull was a school teacher before she was married, and teaches her own children; 'twill be a capital place for you to brush up your studies, if you wanted to do such a thing. But I tell you: he's going to be over to my house to-morrow night. Come over about dusk, or soon as you can after supper, and we'll talk it over."

So early the next evening Ray found himself face to face with Mr. George Woodhull, and listened with glowing cheeks to that gentleman's proposition.

“Your work will be entirely about the house and barns,” he said, “and there will be nothing you cannot easily learn to do. What I want is to have some one at the farm when I am away, who I know is thoroughly trustworthy, and who will see that everything is kept up in proper order. You may go to just as many meetings as you please, as long as your duties are not neglected; and we’ll give you every opportunity to read and study that is possible. I’m willing to pay you well for the work, say twenty-five dollars a month, for eight months, to begin as soon as you can get away from the mill. Are you willing to come?”

Willing? Wasn’t it for just such an opportunity that he had for weeks been praying? And with a thankful heart he accepted the position, to begin two weeks from that very day, as he could not get away from the mill before that. But what amazed him most was the compensation offered; and it was not until years after that he knew that Mr. Jacob Woodhull had added an extra five dollars to each month’s pay, it being *one* of the ways that the eccentric old man had taken to see “that that boy lost nothing by settling up his old scores with him”; and there were *others* to follow.

After the lad had gone, the two men spent some time planning for his farther advancement just as fast as he should prove worthy of it, and they did it with a heartiness that showed a deep interest in him already

awakened in their hearts. Had either one of them been asked to account for this interest, he would have softly repeated the Master's words: "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

It was the Master's work, and done for the Master's sake.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LONG POINT FARM.

**O**WENSETT BAY, at the head of which the town of Afton stood, was a beautiful sheet of water. It was six or eight miles long, and three to four miles broad, and for the most part comparatively regular in the curvature of its shores. On the east side, however, there was one marked exception, as about five miles down the bay a point of land, nearly a mile long, and half as broad, jutted directly out into the water. This point of land was owned by Mr. George Woodhull, and formed what was known in the neighborhood as "Long Point Farm."

Mr. Woodhull had inherited the property from his father, but through an untiring industry and indomitable thrift, had gone on making change after change, and adding improvement to improvement, until the place was now regarded as in many respects "the model farm" of the locality. Ray Branford, as on the morning of his arrival there he accompanied Mr. Woodhull about the place, thought nothing more could be added to it, either in convenience or usefulness.

On a pleasant knoll, and commanding a fine view up

and down the bay, was the farmhouse, spacious in size, and neat and tasteful in all its appointments. Back of this, and a little to the right, was the horse barn, with its carriage shed, harness room, and granary. To the left, but farther away, was the huge cattle barn, fitted with every modern appliance for the convenient and systematic care of a noble herd of Jerseys. Beyond this, and on a line with the farmhouse, was the tenement house for the hired man and his family. Then, arranged in near proximity, were the hennery, the sheep barn, and the other out-buildings so necessary to a well-ordered farm. Every building was in thorough repair, the walks and drives running between them were neatly kept, the walls and fences of the meadows and orchards and pastures exhibited a similar care, and the whole appearance of the farm spoke of the thrift and thoroughness for which its owner was noted.

“I have found,” said Mr. Woodhull, as he showed Ray what there was to be done at each building, “that the animals on a place do a great deal better under one person’s care, and when one person is held responsible for them. They are more systematically cared for, the food goes farther, and the cattle thrive better. It is on this account I have hired you. Mr. Smith, my hired man, and his two grown sons will look out for the farmwork. You are simply to look out for the live stock, to take the produce to market, and go up town on the errands that

may be necessary for the house. Sometimes you will use the horses to do this; at other times, when the wind is favorable, you will go by boat, as that is the shorter and quicker way to town. On Sundays you are to have a horse to go up to the morning service and to the Sunday-school at Afton, if you so choose. Sunday evenings you will, on account of the chores, have to be back here at the farm. Friday nights if you care, after your work, to take a boat and go over to the prayer meetings, I have nothing to say. When I am not at home, Mr. Smith will see that the folks are taken over to our little church. We understand the arrangement now; so come on to the house and get acquainted with the women folks, for you are to be one with us."

Ray found that the immediate household at Long Point Farm consisted of Mr. Woodhull, his wife, their three children, Georgie, a boy of eight, and twin girls of three, and Mrs. Berray, the mother of Mrs. Woodhull. He was so cordially welcomed by them all that he at once felt at home. Mrs. Berray, the mother, when she shook hands with him, looked long and searchingly into his face, and then said:

"They tell me thou hast chosen that good part, like Mary of old, which shall not be taken from thee. Never forget to daily thank the Master for that great gift; and may thy coming to this house be a blessing to us and to thee."

When shown to his room, Ray found it was a large one on the second floor, and so chosen that he could look from its windows off over the bay toward Afton, and when the weather was fair he could plainly see the spire of the First Church pointing heavenward.

The room was well furnished, and in one corner was a bookcase well filled with books. Every convenience for writing and for study was on the open desk, and the boy's heart was filled with thankfulness toward God and his new friends, as he realized that there was nothing now to prevent his spiritual and intellectual advancement. Before he retired that night, he wrote out a set of rules which should now govern him as he began his new life. These he placed where each morning and evening he could readily behold them, and each rule was followed with the Scriptural reason for adopting it. He always said they were of great help to him in his Christian life; and that they may possibly be of some help to other young Christians, I give them here:

RULE I.—I will ever remember whose I am and whom I serve.

“Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price.”

RULE II.—I will do all things thoroughly and well, and to the glory of God.

“Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

RULE III.—I will daily look to God for wisdom, strength, and grace.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

RULE IV.—I will give one-tenth of every dollar that comes into my hands unto the Lord.

“Of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee.”

RULE V.—I will use every possible opportunity to win others for Christ.

“He that winneth souls is wise.”

The days now glided swiftly by. Ray soon mastered the routine of his work, and found his duties neither onerous nor exacting; he also proved to his employer that he was both willing and capable. It was soon evident, moreover, that his outdoor life agreed with him. For some months before he left the mill all had noticed that he was growing thin and pale, exceedingly nervous, and unable to sleep well at night. Now he ate heartily and slept well, while the sun browned his cheeks, and the fresh air filled out his frame. His daily intercourse with refined and Christian people gave new tone to his own walk and conversation; his study and his reading improved his mind; the spiritual influences thrown around him elevated his soul. He had told Mr. Carleton and Miss Squire, on the first Sunday he went up to the village, of the change he had made in his occupation and home, and they now noted the changes in him, and silently thanked God for them.

He had been at Long Point Farm but a short time when Mrs. Woodhull had asked him about his studies. She had proposed to him when at Afton to call on the

principal of the town school and ascertain what studies it would be necessary for him to make up, in order to enter the school the next fall in the classes with those of his own age. He had done this, and came home with a pile of books that was absolutely appalling to any one with a less indomitable courage than he possessed. Mrs. Woodhull had found some of the studies beyond her ability to teach him, and, while she offered to help him with such as lay within her power, she proposed that he should go up to Mr. Carleton once a week and receive help on the others. Mr. Carleton readily consented to the arrangement, and so every Friday night Ray went home with Mr. Carleton from the prayer meeting and spent an hour on his Latin and geometry. It made him late home at the farm, but as he was always up in time for his morning work, Mr. Woodhull made no objection to the plan.

The boy's life was a busy one now. From early in the morning until dark he kept at his farm duties. For three hours every evening he read or studied. On Sundays he always attended the morning preaching service and Sunday-school at Afton. On Friday evenings he rowed or sailed over to the village for the prayer meeting and his recitations; or if the weather did not permit his going by water, he walked the whole distance of seven miles around the road to the village, and then walked back to the farm. He did this a number of times until

Mr. Woodhull interfered, saying: "I did not mean, Ray, you should not take a horse on Friday nights, when I told you you could go by boat. I never once thought of your going when you couldn't cross the bay. After this, if you can't go by boat, and must go, take one of the horses."

Before three months had passed away Ray had so fully gained the confidence of his employer by his fidelity and industry, that that gentleman hardly knew how he could get along without him. "Uncle Jacob," he said one day as he was talking with him about the boy, "you needn't pay that extra five dollars on the boy's monthly salary; he earns every bit of it, and I can better afford to give it to him than I can to have him go. He is the best help, without exception, I ever hired; and do you know he is serving the Master as faithfully as he is serving me. There is Smith, my hired man, and his two sons; they were good moral fellows, but not a bit religious when Ray came. Now all three are reading their Bibles and praying daily, and when they related their experiences last week each one admitted it was something that boy said to them that first started him on the heavenly road. Every animal on the place loves him, and he can do almost anything he wants to with them; and as for the children, any one of them will go to Ray sooner than to their mother or to me. After this, Uncle Jacob, you may pick out my help for me, if you will guarantee that they will all turn out as well."

The old gentleman shook his head slowly: "I can't do it, George, for to my mind, not one in ten is so thoroughly converted as he was; and to think so many of us were afraid the Lord hadn't done it. Guess it will be some time before the First Church people make another such mistake."

Then there came an incident in the Long Point Farm life long to be remembered, and which so endeared Ray to Mr. and Mrs. Woodhull that from that hour they regarded him as their son.

George and the twins had gone out to play. For a time they ran about the lawn in front of the house, but the gate into the lane had been left open, and the children soon discovered it. Though they had been told again and again not to go out of the yard, the temptation was great, and their little memories were short, and a bright idea crept into Georgie's brain. So he proposed to the twins: "Ray has gone up to the town, and will be back soon; let us go and meet him." The twins were nothing loth, as a ride after Old Jim, the horse, was the height of their childish ambitions, and away the three trudged down the lane.

Before a great while they grew tired and sat down to rest by a gate opening into one of the pastures. Some bright flowers in the field attracted the attention of one of the twins, and, clapping her tiny hands, she cried:

"Pitty flow's! pitty flow's! Me get 'em for mamma'."

"All right," said the undaunted Georgie; "I'll get them for you." And he began to climb over the gate.

"Me come, too!" both twins screamed, and managed to squeeze their little bodies between the bars of the gate, and the three children were soon busy picking the flowers that grew in such profusion at their feet.

Now, it happened that Mr. Woodhull had arrived home but a few days before with a drove of half-wild steers, and they were turned into this pasture. The children, accustomed to the sight of cattle daily, had thought nothing of the presence of the steers, though they saw them at no great distance away. To their childish minds they were no more to be feared than the good, kind cows Ray drove back and forth from the other pasture every day.

But one of the steers, wilder and fiercer than the rest, had caught sight of the little ones, and, possibly attracted by the bright garments they wore, now came pawing and bellowing down toward them. The children cried out in their fright, and ran for the gate. But they had unconsciously wandered some distance from it, and before they had reached it the steer was upon them.

Meantime, the mother had missed the children, and had come out to the lane to look for them. She heard their screams, and at once surmised their cause. With a swiftness such as only a mother who realizes the danger that threatens her children can know, she sped down the





Black Forge Mills.

lane toward the pasture. But swift as she went, she would not have arrived there in time to save her darlings; they must have been gored and trampled to death had there not been providentially one nearer than she. Ray, from up the lane, had seen the children get through the gate into the field. He realized the danger that threatened them even before it appeared, and, whipping up his horse, he drove rapidly toward them. When the steer rushed for the children he was nearly to the gate, and driving close up to it he sprang over into the field, grabbing the broad leather strap to which the hitching weight was attached as he went. Swinging this over his head, he rushed between Georgie, who had manfully turned to defend his little sisters, and the steer, and brought the weight full down upon the furious animal's head. The beast was stunned for a moment, and Ray shouted to Georgie to take his little sisters and run into the lane.

The steer now turned his attention to Ray, and the children easily reached the gate, just as their mother arrived there also. She helped them up into the wagon, and then breathlessly watched the conflict between the heroic lad and the infuriated beast. As the steer rushed for him, Ray once more swung the weight with both hands, and brought it down upon his bellowing antagonist. It struck one of his horns, and breaking it off, sent a stream of blood over the animal's face.

Disconcerted, bewildered for a moment, he paused and tore up the turf in his agony and fury.

Ray took advantage of this, and, turning, he ran for the lane, but before he reached the fence the steer again charged upon him. So sudden was the attack that the lad only had time to make a short whirl with his weapon, which, as it came around, swung over the animal's neck and down under his fore feet. There was force enough in it, however, to trip the beast, and he fell heavily forward, breaking a leg. Ray, breathless with his severe exertion, now crawled over the gate and into the wagon, just as Mr. Woodhull and Mr. Smith came running up with pitchforks in their hands to his rescue.

As modestly as possible the boy explained the circumstances under which he had found the children, and how he had rescued them; but Mrs. Woodhull did not hesitate to call his act heroic, and thanked and complimented him in turn, until the lad's cheeks fairly burned with embarrassment. From that hour his position at Long Point Farm was more that of a son than a servant; and it was well, indeed, that he had such friends, for the time was near at hand when he was to stand in sore need of them.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BURGLARY.

ALL Afton awoke one Saturday morning in July, and speedily went into a state of intense excitement. One of its largest stores on the main street had been forcibly opened during the night, and robbed of goods to the value of several hundred dollars.

The robbery was not discovered until the proprietor had come down to the store in the morning, at the usual hour. Examination then showed that the burglary had doubtless been committed by some one who was well acquainted with the premises, and also by some one unaccustomed to such work. An expert would have made a neater and a more thorough job of it.

The block in which the robbed store was situated stood at the corner of Main and Bank Streets, and but a short distance from the Bay; in fact, a narrow lane ran from the rear of the building directly down to the wharves. The entrance to the store had been gained from an adjoining one, which at that time was unoccupied. The back door of the empty store had been carelessly left unlocked, and the robbers, entering this room, had sawed a hole in the partition between the stores large enough to

permit them to crawl through. It then had been an easy task, apparently, for them to unfasten the back door of the occupied store, and carry the stolen goods down the narrow lane to the dock without being discovered. Here they had possibly stowed the plunder they had obtained into a boat, and carried it away. These facts showed that whoever the guilty parties were, they were perfectly familiar with the store and its surroundings.

On the other hand, the entrance to the store had been effected in a bungling and unworkmanlike manner ; and though an attempt had been made to blow up the store safe, it had evidently failed because the burglars had no proper tools for accomplishing their purpose. There was also an apparent haste and indiscrimination in the selection of the goods that had been taken, which an expert thief would scarcely have manifested. Indeed, many of the articles taken seemed to suggest that the robbers were youthful as well as inexperienced. These circumstances together with the evident familiarity of the thieves with the store, led the proprietor and the police to believe that the burglary had been committed by some one living in or near the town ; and consequently they began their search for the criminals right at home.

It was not long before they found what appeared to them to be several important clues leading toward the identification of the thieves. A heavy thunder shower had set in the night before, about ten o'clock, and had

continued until long after midnight. Tracks at the rear door of the store revealed the fact that the robbery must have taken place *after* the storm, and that there were two burglars, if not more. A small piece of cloth was found attached to the edge of the hole in the partition, and had the appearance of having been torn from the coat of one of the robbers as he crawled through the opening. Later in the day a coat was found under a pile of lumber on the wharf, of the very same material as the scrap of cloth which had been found attached to the partition between the stores, and, wrapped inside of it, were the saw and auger which had been used to gain entrance to the building. It was soon rumored also that this coat had been identified, and that one or more arrests might be expected any moment.

It was Ray himself who had brought the tidings of the robbery to Long Point Farm. He had gone over to the town the night before in the large sail boat, as he was to bring back a load of grain. Mr. Woodhull had tried at first to dissuade him from going, as there were already signs of the approaching storm, and the night would doubtless, at the time for his return, be exceedingly dark, even if the winds and waves were not unfavorable. But Ray persisted. "Next month," he said, "Mr. Carleton will be off on his vacation, and I wish to get along as far as possible in my studies before he goes. If it should storm hard when I am through with my recitation, I can

remain with him until the tempest is over. I'll take along the big sail cloth, to cover the grain; and as long as I get around in time for the morning chores, it will make no great difference."

As Mr. Woodhull made no further objection to his going, Ray cast off the fastenings of the boat, and, with the wind directly across its beam, started for the town. He arrived there about dark, but had time to go up to the store before the meeting, and order the grain he wished to be delivered at the wharf by half-past eight. He also did a number of other errands; and, with his arms full of bundles, entered the lecture room of the First Church just as the service began.

Many recalled afterward the prayer the lad offered that evening, not so much for the ideas expressed in it as for the deep fervor and consciousness of the Master's presence that it exhibited. "How that boy grows in grace!" was the thought of more than one there that night.

When the meeting closed, it was already thundering heavily, and the clouds looked as though it might rain at any moment. Ray therefore said to his pastor:

"Mr. Carleton, I am afraid it will rain before I get through with my recitation, and, as I have some grain down at the boat, I will first go and see that it is properly covered, and put these bundles on board; then I will come round to the parsonage."

A half hour later, he rang the parsonage bell, and when shown to the study he seemed greatly stirred up about something, and Mr. Carleton noticed also that he had on an old ragged coat, in the place of the one he wore when he had left the church. Ray saw his pastor's glance at the coat, and immediately said, apologetically:

“When I got down to the wharf, Mr. Carleton, I found the bags of grain had been dumped out on the dock, and, taking off my coat, I laid it on a pile of lumber near by, while I stowed them away in the boat and covered them over with a sail cloth. When I had finished, and went to get my coat, I couldn't find it; either I have overlooked it in the darkness, or else some one stole it while I was at work. I happened to have this old one on the boat, and so put it on to wear up here.”

After talking awhile on the singularity of the circumstance, they turned their attention to the lessons before them. When Ray had completed his recitation it was raining hard, and at Mr. Carleton's suggestion he waited for it to hold up. Toward midnight, as there seemed to be no cessation of the storm, he told Mr. Carleton he would not keep him up any longer, and arose to go.

“You had better remain right here to-night,” Mr. Carleton said, “and go home early in the morning.”

“No,” replied Ray; “I'll go down to my boat and crawl into the cuddy, and as soon as the storm slackens I'll drop down the bay.”

He even refused the umbrella Mr. Carleton offered him, and darted off through the rain and darkness. Both of them, however, soon had reason to wish he had remained there quietly until morning.

When Ray reached the boat, he first examined the grain, to see that it was fully protected from the storm; then he crawled into the little cabin of the boat and lay down. It was not his intention to go to sleep, but it was late and he was tired, and soon a drowsiness crept over him, and in spite of every effort on his part to throw it off, he succumbed to it. He must have slept long and soundly, for it was broad daylight when he awoke. Provoked at himself for going to sleep at all, he crawled out of the cuddy, and began to make preparations for dropping down the bay. He thought, however, of his missing coat, and took a few minutes to look over the lumber for it, but without finding a trace of it. He now threw off the hindward fastening to his boat, and then stepped along to the bow to undo the fastening there, when he was attracted by a crowd up at the corner of Main and Bank Streets, and ran up there to see what the trouble was. He now learned of the burglary, and it was while he stood there that the bit of cloth was found clinging to the opening in the partition. Ray, with others, looked at it, then he turned abruptly, and hurrying from the store went down to the boat, cast off his painter, and started for Long Point Farm.

He did not arrive there until Mr. Woodhull had completed the morning chores, and that gentleman at once noticed that he seemed to be troubled and perplexed about something; but when he told of the loss of his coat, and that he had overslept himself, Mr. Woodhull thought these things fully accounted for his singular behavior. He felt sure of it when Ray said: "I never before had to have you do my work for me, and I shall take care that such a thing does not happen again."

"Oh," said Mr. Woodhull, laughingly, "I am extremely glad you have failed to be on time once; you are usually so punctual it is refreshing to find that you, like the rest of us, are sometimes obliged to yield to circumstances." And then the matter dropped.

All the forenoon Ray, while he kept busily at work, seemed to be unusually thoughtful and pre-occupied. It was not until they were at dinner that he spoke of the robbery, and then he only briefly explained that he had been attracted by the crowd around the store before he left the village, and going up to the building he had learned of the event. He answered all of the questions that were asked him concerning the affair frankly enough, but Mr. Woodhull thought, once or twice, he seemed about to speak of some additional circumstance, and then checked himself.

In the afternoon, however, he seemed like his old self, and after supper he romped and played with the children

until bedtime. He then got his Bible and other helps, and sat down with the rest of the family, as he always did, to study the Sunday-school lesson for the next day. They were busily engaged over the lesson when a wagon drove hurriedly into the yard, and a moment later a loud knock was heard at the door.

All noticed that Ray suddenly grew pale and became strangely agitated as Mr. Woodhull went to the door. Whoever was there, he spoke to Mr. Woodhull in a low tone, who then went out, closing the door after him. He was gone a long time, and when he came in he looked exceedingly grave. Crossing the room to Ray's side, he laid his hand affectionately upon the boy's head, saying :

"My son, whatever trouble has come to you, remember I do not distrust you one moment, and all that I can do for you shall be done. I have no doubt of your innocence; but the officers are here to arrest you for last night's burglary."

Ray made no answer; but, bowing his head on his hands, burst into tears.

"What is it, husband?" "What is it, George?" the wife and her mother exclaimed in turn. "Ray arrested for robbery! Shame on those who even think him guilty of such a thing!" cried Mrs. Woodhull, indignantly.

Mr. Woodhull nodded his head, though too much overcome by his own feelings to speak; and then he waited for Ray to recover from his paroxysm of tears. After a

while the lad ceased to weep, and, raising his head, looked up searchingly into Mr. Woodhull's face.

His employer looked lovingly and kindly down into his tear-stained countenance, and said, gently :

“Before I let the officers in, tell me, my boy, just what you may care to have me know about it. Again I repeat I believe in your innocency.”

“Mr. Woodhull,” said Ray, earnestly and calmly now, “I *am* innocent. I know no more than you do who broke into that store. Circumstances are all against me, however, and I do not see that I can establish my innocence. I have puzzled over it all day, and it looks darker and darker to me all the time. There is my life before I became a Christian : that is against me. Then I was at the village last night. I was there early this morning. I have no one to substantiate my statement that I was sound asleep in my boat from midnight until morning, at the very dock where the robbers must have carried off their goods. It certainly looks as if I must have been allied with them. More than all this, I lost my coat last night, in a manner strangely unaccountable to me and to any one else ; and do you know”—his voice lowering almost to a whisper—“while I was in the store this morning, one of the men found on the edge of the opening in the partition, a piece of cloth that had evidently been torn from the clothing of one of the robbers as he crawled through, and it was exactly like the mate-

rial of my missing coat. I can't account for it; but I knew it at once, and all day I have felt sure that I should be arrested for this crime. I don't care for myself. I am innocent, and my Saviour knows it, and I am content. But there will be so many who will believe I am guilty, that I am afraid the cause of Christ will suffer irreparable harm. But you all believe in me, and there are others who will; and God can even overrule this for my good and his glory. Tell the officers I will get ready at once to go with them."

"I tried," said Mr. Woodhull, "to have them leave you here until Monday, telling them I would be responsible for you, but they refuse to do so. I will, however, come up early Monday morning and arrange bail for you, and secure the best counsel I can obtain. Keep up a brave heart, Ray."

"Yes, sir; I shall cry no more," answered he. And then he went to his room to prepare for his departure.

Mr. Woodhull now called the officers in until Ray could be ready. They were as courteous as could be expected in the discharge of their duty, and though extremely reticent, they finally admitted that Ray's coat had been found, and with it the implements which had been used to gain an entrance to the store.

"Is it likely," asked Mr. Woodhull, indignantly, "that that boy, if guilty, was fool enough to put his coat and tools right where they would be readily found? Or that

he would have stayed there until this morning as if inviting an arrest? Any one can see the absurdity of this."

The officer shrugged his shoulders. "We don't pretend to say he was alone," he answered; "nor do I attempt to account for any freak on the part of criminals. I have learned that you never can tell what to expect; perhaps all this was a movement of his to make himself appear innocent—who knows? They say he is very long-headed, and has for months made some of the First Church people think he was a saint, when he was a sinner." And the officer chuckled over his own poor wit.

"You wouldn't speak so of him, if you knew him as we do," broke in Mrs. Woodhull, warmly.

"I hope you may be right," replied the officer, "but I must do my duty, nevertheless." His countenance, however, said only too plainly, "I have worked up this case, and I know that boy is guilty."

Ray now appeared, carefully dressed for his journey. "I presume there is no objection to my taking this book with me," he said, as he showed the officer his Bible.

"No," was the curt answer; but the manner of the officer indicated that his thought was: "You can't pull any wool over my eyes by your pious tricks."

Bidding each member of the family an affectionate good-bye, and kissing the sleeping children, Ray followed the officers to their wagon.

“We shall earnestly pray for you, and early Monday you may look for me,” Mr. Woodhull said, as he parted with him at the door.

An hour or two later Ray was locked in a cell at the village station house, and when the town clock struck twelve, and ushered in the Lord’s Day, he lay on his hard pallet, sleeping as peacefully as in his own bed. Every anxiety had vanished, every burden had lifted, for he had committed his way unto the Lord, and the divine voice had answered back: “Fear not; for I am with thee.”

There was peace in his soul—the peace of God “which passeth all understanding.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?

THERE are three astonishing things in this world; I presume there may be many more, but there certainly are *three*. First of all, it is astonishing how fast evil tidings will travel. Ray Branford was not arrested until Saturday evening, and it was well on toward midnight when he was locked up in the Afton jail; yet by far the greater portion of the citizens of that thriving town knew of his arrest, and were discussing it, when at their Sunday morning breakfast tables.

Then it is astonishing how ready the average human mind is to accept *all* evil tidings, and *especially* those that are injurious to one's character, as the unvarnished truth. There were probably not a half dozen families in the town that morning which had heard of the arrest, whose members did not believe the boy to be guilty. Some who had been bitterly opposed to the reception of the lad into the membership of the First Church, now came forward with that old saw, which has been repeated from time immemorial, and I presume will be repeated so long as human judgment is imperfect, "I told you so." Then others, who had felt that the boy must be received, and

yet in heart had regarded him as scarcely worthy of it, now shook their heads sagely, and said: "It has turned out about as we expected." While others, who had really believed in the boy's conversion, and had watched his progress with pleasure, now sadly remarked: "How we were deceived in him!" Yea, some who had only the Friday evening before at the prayer meeting listened to that boy's prayer, and had been so moved by it as to comment upon his growth in grace, now suddenly reversed their opinion, asking, "How could that boy have prayed like that, and then have gone right out from that prayer room to help rob that store? He must be a hardened wretch, after all." Among them all hardly one was found who asked: "Is he guilty?" All unhesitatingly, and that, too, upon the slightest circumstantial evidence, pronounced him guilty of the crime for which he had been arrested. I do not attempt to account for the fact; I only know it existed.

Then another astonishing fact is how slight a circumstance, if it is only sensational, will draw a large congregation. Some of the First Church people had arisen that morning with a determination to stay at home from the church services—it was so extremely warm and uncomfortable. But when they learned of the arrest, they recalled the fact that Mr. Carleton had had an unbounded confidence in the imprisoned lad.

"I wonder if he will make any allusion to this event

in the services to-day?" each thought. "Really I must go and see." Then there was an unusual hurrying around, and, when the bell tolled for the service, out from mansion and cottage a vast throng poured into the streets, and hurried off toward the First Church.

Nor was it simply the First Church people that gathered there that morning. In every church there is a part of the congregation that has itching ears. These remembered the intimate relation the First Church pastor had held with the arrested lad; and it happened, therefore, that a goodly number from every church in the town deserted their usual church homes that morning, and ran off to the First Church, just to hear what its pastor would have to say respecting this most remarkable circumstance.

So, when Mr. Carleton entered his pulpit, he found himself face to face with a congregation that filled the large house to its utmost capacity; nor could he account for it, since he, poor man! had not even heard of Ray's arrest.

The services moved on in their regular order without the slightest circumstance to gratify the curiosity of the expectant throng until Mr. Carleton announced his text; then each one glanced at his nearest neighbor significantly, and settled himself as comfortably in his seat as possible to hear what he felt sure would follow.

Poor Mr. Carleton saw their glances, and for the life

of him could not account for them. Was his necktie awry? Had he forgotten his cuffs? Or, had he quoted his text wrongly? He glanced quickly at his wrists—no; his cuffs were on. He raised his hand quickly to his collar—no; his tie was in its place. It must be then he had misquoted his text. So, louder and more distinctly, he repeated it: “I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood.” Again those meaning glances and the same settling back in the pews with an expectant air. This repetition of the text promised well, and the dumbest ear in that house was now alert.

Mr. Carleton proceeded with his sermon, but the unusual attitude of his congregation had in a measure disconcerted him, and he hardly spoke with his accustomed freedom; while a tremulousness, of which he was absolutely unconscious, was detected in his tones by his attentive hearers.

They all felt sure, then, as he stated Judas’ sin to be that of avarice, and went on to show how through his slight pilferings from the bag he bore the sin had grown upon him until he was even ready to betray his Lord for his own gain, that he had in mind the arrested boy, and that he, with them, was now ready to pronounce him guilty.

“An able discourse, and so appropriate to the occasion!” “How delicately, and yet how pointedly, he alluded to that boy’s sin!” and similar comments were

heard on all sides, as the vast congregation left the house.

But Mr. Carleton, ignorant of the fact that he had been encouraging his people to commit that most despicable of sins, the speaking evil of one another, came down from the desk, and, meeting Mr. Bacon, shook hands with him, remarking, pleasantly :

“We had a large congregation to-day, Brother Bacon.”

“Yes ; and judging by your sermon, pastor, you evidently know the cause of it.”

“My sermon ! The cause of it ! I don’t understand you, Brother Bacon !” Mr. Carleton exclaimed, in his bewilderment.

“Why, didn’t you know Ray Branford is now in the lock-up, arrested for the burglary of Friday night ?” asked Mr. Bacon, in his turn surprised.

“I certainly did not,” his pastor answered. “I saw he was not here, as usual, but had no idea of the cause. Unwittingly, then, I have given my people the impression that I believe he is guilty.”

“The most of them came here already believing him guilty, I fear,” replied Mr. Bacon ; “and of course your sermon would seem to them to indicate that you held the same opinion.”

“What do *you* think ?” asked Mr. Carleton, quickly.

“That I will not condemn the boy untried and unconvicted,” gravely answered Mr. Bacon.

Mr. Carleton shook hands with him again warmly, and then he said :

“Immediately after dinner I will go over to the lock-up to see the boy. He must sadly stand in need of friends now. Will you go with me, Brother Bacon ?”

“Yes. Stop as you pass the house, and I’ll be ready,” was the hearty reply.

One other there was who had not heard of Ray’s arrest. It was his teacher, Miss Squire. Detained at home from the morning preaching service by her mother’s sudden illness, she came hastily into the Sunday-school, ignorant of the whole sad affair. Looking around on her boys, and noticing Ray’s absence from the class for the first time since the memorable Sunday more than a year ago, when he had first become a scholar, she asked, innocently :

“Do any of you know why Ray is not here to-day? Was he at church ?”

The boys looked curiously at each other, and then one of them answered :

“No, ma’am ; I rather guess he wasn’t ; for he’s in the lockup, arrested for robbing Shephard’s store Friday night.”

Miss Squire did not answer a word, but looked steadily at her boys for a few minutes, as though she would read their souls ; then, with a sigh, she took up the lesson for the day. But as soon as the school closed she went di-

rectly to her pastor, and, with tears in her eyes, she asked:

“You have heard about poor Ray?”

“Yes,” he briefly replied, and looked sadly down into her upturned face. Then suddenly, as if reading there something he longed to see, he added:

“But you at least do not regard him as guilty, neither does Mr. Bacon; and we shall go down to see him directly after dinner.”

“Would it be out of place for me to take father with me and visit him also?” she asked.

“No; to my mind it would be a Christ-like thing to do,” he gladly replied. “I was in prison, and ye visited me,” he added, softly. She nodded, too overcome to reply in words, and then hastened home to prepare for her visit.

It had been a long morning to Ray. There was no window in his cell, and the feeble light that reached him came struggling in through a window at the farther end of the corridor. He could not see well enough to read his Bible, but he heard the church bells, when they rang for service; and as he thought of the sermon he could not hear, and the school he could not attend, he determined to have a service of his own. He first sang, in a low tone, the hymn, “Nearer, my God, to thee”; then he repeated all the promises he could recall from God’s word. After that he repeated every verse of Scripture that he knew with either the word “faith,” or “grace,”

or "peace" in it. He was glad now that he had made a daily habit of learning at least one verse from the sacred word, and he was surprised at the number of verses he could recall. Finally, he knelt by his iron bedstead and offered up his prayer unto God. This service greatly cheered and comforted him ; for Christ himself drew near and spoke, in the words he had recalled, directly to his heart.

While eating his scanty dinner, he wondered if Mr. Carleton or Miss Squire had heard of his arrest, and if they would visit him in his prison cell. He was confident they and some others of the First Church people would believe he was innocent of the crime with which he was charged ; but he was not prepared for the throng of visitors who soon began to pour in upon him.

His first caller was Mr. Jacob Woodhull. He had come up to the preaching service and Sunday-school as usual, but was well back on his way home before he learned from an acquaintance, who overtook him, of Ray's imprisonment. He immediately turned around and retraced his steps to the village, and before the boy was through eating was shown to the door of the cell.

He listened attentively to Ray's account of the sad affair, and then questioned him closely as to the loss of his coat and his sleeping on board the sloop. The old gentleman, though odd, was, nevertheless, keen and shrewd, and he soon said :

“There are but two points to clear up, and your innocence is established beyond question. I have an idea this will not be so hard as it now seems. Anyway, we will do all we can. I will be on hand to-morrow morning when you are examined; and just trust God, Ray! just trust him!”

He left the station house and went directly to the telegraph office, and was fortunate enough to find the operator still in. “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day,” he said to himself, and then sent two messages to a neighboring city—one was directed to a lawyer of well-known legal reputation, the other to the most expert detective on the city’s police force—and both read the same: “Come here on first train to-morrow.” His interest in Ray was again manifesting itself in a most practical form.

He had scarcely left the jail when Mr. Carleton and Mr. Bacon were announced. They shook hands with Ray through the iron grating of his cell, and their hearty expression of faith in him brought hope and gladness to his heart. After talking long and earnestly with him concerning the circumstances of his arrest, they, too, bade him be of good cheer, and then departed—Mr. Carleton going to the chief of police to see if he could not secure more comfortable quarters for the boy, while Mr. Bacon, in utter ignorance of what Jacob Woodhull had done, went after the telegraph operator to send

messages to the very same lawyer and detective to whom that gentleman's message had already gone. He learned from the operator that these messages had been sent, but believing it would give additional emphasis to the coming of those gentlemen, he had his own messages forwarded also.

Mr. Carleton met with a very cold reception from the chief of police, who plainly told the minister he was meddling with what did not concern him, and that young Branford should stay where he was, even if all Afton should beg for his release. Indignant at his treatment, Mr. Carleton started for home; but before he turned off from the main street, he saw Dr. Gasque driving toward him. He stopped the doctor, and found that he, having been out of the village all night attending a very sick patient, had not even heard of the arrest. Quickly explaining the circumstances under which it had occurred, Mr. Carleton told of his visit to the chief of police, and the manner of his reception. Dr. Gasque expressed his indignation in no gentle terms, and then added: "I have a patient to attend to first, then I will go around to the station house and see what can be done for Ray. I promise you he shall have more comfortable quarters for the night." As Dr. Gasque was president of the town board of officers, and held in his hands the power to even dismiss the chief of police, Mr. Carleton knew the promise was not vainly made.

Meantime, other callers had come and gone at that cell door. This time it was Miss Squire and her father. She had gone home from Sunday-school scarcely knowing how she could persuade her father to accompany her to the jail; for he was at times crusty and irascible, and her mother's sudden illness had put him out of sorts with himself and everybody else. He cared, moreover, little or nothing for religious matters, and no appeal to him from the Christian side would have the slightest weight with him. But she remembered that a striking characteristic of his was to radically oppose whatever others approved. Because others maintained the earth was round, he stoutly persisted it was flat; because others said the national colors were red, white, and blue, he declared all were color blind but himself, for they were red, white, and green. She hoped, therefore, by showing him that the majority of the First Church people believed Ray was guilty, he would strenuously maintain he was innocent; and if he only once assumed this position, no stone would be left unturned by him to secure the boy's acquittal if it could honorably be done.

As though it was a mere matter of news she alluded to Ray's arrest, and the sudden change in the attitude of many who had called themselves his friends. Before she was half done her father brought his fist down upon a small stand near him with a force that overturned it, demolishing a rare vase that stood upon it. "Look here,

Ettie," he cried, "that boy is innocent; any fool can see that. Ring the bell for dinner, and tell James to have the carriage at the door the moment we are done, or I'll discharge him. I am going right down to the station house to let the lad know he has one friend in Burton Squire, even if all others forsake him. Did you say that Carleton believed in his innocence, and Bacon, too; well, they are the only sensible men in the whole town. I'll go to hear Carleton preach next Sunday if I have to be carried into the church. And, see here, Ettie; you get ready to go with me; it's a pity if that boy's teacher cannot show him what she thinks of him. You'll find an old heathen like myself knows enough to visit a man when he's in prison, and feed him, and clothe him, too, if it's necessary."

So, soon after Mr. Carleton had left the office of the chief of police, that worthy official saw to his dismay the carriage of the rich and influential Burton Squire roll up to the station-house door. "Can it be possible he has come to see that boy?" he asked of one of his men who stood near him.

"I guess so," the man answered, with a grin; "all Afton is against the youngster, so far as I can hear, and that is enough to make the general take up for him; but my! if he takes a notion to have that boy removed from that cell, won't there be music here?" And the chief thought so a half hour later, when the angry man hob-

bled into his presence, and demanded that the boy be put in a better room at once, or he would know the reason why. General Squire's haughty and commanding tones aroused the anger of the officer, and he flatly refused his request. So fully was the chief's attention taken up with the tirade of abuse that the general now poured down upon him, that he did not notice that another carriage had driven to the jail door, and that a gentleman getting out of it had come hastily into the room.

"General Squire," the new-comer said, "there is no need of such language as this. Captain Gardiner, release that boy from that cell at once, and send an officer with him up to my house; he will stop there to-night, of course under guard of the officer. To-morrow you will account to our board for your want of courtesy to Mr. Carleton, and to the general. We have felt for some time that a change in our police force was necessary."

The speaker was Dr. Gasque, and it is needless to add that his request was immediately complied with.

Mr. Carleton, on his arrival home, learned that a lady was waiting to see him. He found, on entering the parlor, that it was Betsy Branford, Ray's sister-in-law. First apologizing for her call at that time, she with some fear and trembling gave him a revelation that filled him with astonishment, and led him to say: "This is most important, and absolutely clears the boy, and I think we

can manage it, too, without your appearing on the witness stand at all; so have no fear." Then, at the close of the evening service, he had still another caller, a boy who brought with him a large bundle. When he departed he left the bundle behind, and Mr. Carleton hastened in, and said to his wife, who had already retired: "Well, Mary, one of the darkest facts against Ray, that of the missing coat, is all clear. Now let us find a way to clear up the other—his sleeping on his boat while those men were carrying on their robbery almost above his head—and then he is completely exonerated. I am not sure but God has sent this arrest to teach the people of Afton a lesson they will never forget."

At nine o'clock the next morning, Ray was brought before the police court for examination. He could not feel that he was alone, however, for Mr. George Woodhull, and Mr. Jacob Woodhull, Mr. Bacon, Mr. Carleton, Dr. Gasque, General Squire, Deacon Blake, and a half dozen more, were gathered around him as friends and well-wishers. Beside him, too, as counsel, sat the Hon. Benjamin H. Eaton, one of the leading lawyers of the State, and the presence of this gentleman so overawed the little lawyer who acted as prosecuting attorney, and even the police judge himself, that those worthy functionaries could scarcely attend properly to their official duties. Of course, the court room was crowded with interested spectators, but if they had expected the trial

to proceed that morning they were disappointed ; for as soon as Ray had plead not guilty to the indictment read to him, Mr. Eaton arose, and asked that the case be postponed until Wednesday morning.

“ Your honor,” he said, “ I have been in town but a half hour, and have had no time to consult with my client. Several important facts have already come to light, several more are under proper investigation ; by Wednesday morning we shall be able to present our case in a way entirely creditable to my client. I request, therefore, that he be permitted to give bonds for his appearance at that time, and the court now adjourn.”

The request was immediately granted, and bail was fixed at one thousand dollars for the prisoner. A half dozen gentlemen offered themselves as bondsmen, any one of whom would have been more than sufficient for that amount. Evidently the tide was turning, and sympathy was setting in in favor of the lad.

“ Come, Ray,” said Mr. George Woodhull, after the bond had been completed, “ we’ll now go home ; mother and wife and children made me promise to bring you home with me.”

But Mr. Carleton interposed. Drawing Mr. Woodhull one side, he said something to him which caused him to give the first hearty laugh he had given since Ray’s arrest, and to immediately say : “ Of course, it will be best for the boy under those circumstances to stay with

you, but the women folks and the children will be woefully disappointed."

"Well, we will compromise the matter," said Mr. Carleton; "I'll drive down with him to-morrow and take dinner with you." And Mr. Woodhull, accepting the offer, drove away home.

Mr. Carleton, with Ray by his side, left the court room, and walked up town. He took care to call at a number of the stores on the way, and by his words and his acts to show all he met that he regarded Ray as in every way worthy of his attention and respect. As he and the lad turned on to Prospect Avenue, Mrs. Grundy passed them in her carriage, and looking them coldly in the face refused to acknowledge Mr. Carleton's stately bow. "I will let even my pastor know that I in no way approve of his association with criminals," she said, "and at the next church meeting we will ask for letters to the Central Church."

But before the week was out she changed her mind; yes, even she, the fashionable Mrs. Grundy, was glad to call on her pastor and apologize for that morning's discourtesy, and nothing more was ever heard about her changing her church relations.

## CHAPTER IX.

### RAY'S TRIAL AND ACQUITTAL.

WEDNESDAY morning opened dark and lowering, but notwithstanding this, so great was the interest taken in Ray Branford's trial, that the large hall where the judge had decided to hold court was filled to overflowing. Ray sat just within the bar with Mr. Eaton, his counsel, and quite a company of other friends. All the gentlemen who had been with him on Monday morning were there, and with them now were the following ladies: Mrs. George Woodhull, Mrs. Berray, Mrs. Carleton, Mrs. Bacon, Mrs. Gasque, and Miss Squire. Nearly one-half of that vast audience also was made up of ladies, from the very first families of Afton. Rumor had been busy all the day before with certain mysterious suggestions that new and startling developments might be expected at the trial, and this had been sufficient to bring them out in full force.

The judge sat behind his desk, dignified and thoughtful, as so important a case demanded, while the little prosecuting attorney was more at his ease than on the previous Monday, for there was associated with him now another lawyer of considerably wider legal reputation.

At precisely nine o'clock the case of the State *vs.* Ray Branford was called, and the clerk read again the indictment against the lad, and announced the fact that to this charge the prisoner had pleaded "Not Guilty."

The little attorney then arose, and in a piping voice and with a pompous air proceeded to state what the prosecution hoped to prove, and closed by calling Mr. Shephard, the proprietor of the robbed store, to the witness stand.

He being duly sworn, testified that he had first discovered the burglary on opening his store about six o'clock the Saturday morning before, and that he had at once sent for Captain Gardiner, the chief of the town police, who took the matter in charge. He then described the way in which entrance to the store had been effected, and the kind and amount of goods that had been stolen. He gave a detailed account also of the search he and the police had made for traces of the burglars; of their finding tracks at the rear of the store, a bit of cloth on the edge of the opening in the partition, and later, the coat and tools hidden away under a pile of lumber on the dock. He identified the coat on the table before him as the one they had found, by the rent in its back, of the exact size and shape of the pieces of cloth found on the partition, and also by a place on the right side where the coat had at some former time been torn and mended. He recognized the saw and auger as the

tools found with the coat by marks that he had put upon them at the time they were found, and by the bits of wood of the same kind as that of the partition, which were still clinging to them. On his cross-examination he declared that he had no bias or ill-feeling against the prisoner at the bar, and that he knew of no reason why the prisoner should want to injure him. But he as well as others had seen the prisoner on Friday evening wearing the coat that had been found, and this, together with the fact that the prisoner was known to be hanging around the wharf early the next morning without this coat, had led him to have a warrant issued for his arrest. If the prisoner were innocent, no one hoped more than he that the fact would come out at this trial; on the other hand, if he were guilty, he desired that he and his accomplices, if they could be found, might suffer the penalty of the law. He simply asked that justice should be done.

Then Captain Gardiner, the chief of the police, took the stand. From the outset it was evident to all that he, for some reason, held firmly to the belief that Ray was guilty, and that he was determined to convict him if that were possible. It may be that the severe reprimand he had received on Monday afternoon from the town board for his discourtesy to Mr. Carleton and General Squire the day before had created this feeling; or, possibly, he may have felt that his reputation as a skillful and succes-

ful officer would be damaged if the boy were not convicted. At any rate, with bitter invective against Ray and his earlier life, he went on to show that it was his own keenness that had discovered the piece of cloth on the partition, the tracks at the rear of the store, and the coat and tools under the lumber. It was, moreover, his own alertness, that had detected Ray on Saturday morning with another coat on, and prying around that very heap of lumber on the docks. He, too, it was, that had noticed that Ray, as soon as he beheld the piece of cloth that had been found, had abruptly left the store and hurried off down the bay. The finding of the coat, to his mind, was the last link necessary to prove that the boy must at least have been in league with the other culprits. The idea that the boy could have been there at the wharf all night without knowing that the burglary was going on was to him simply absurd. In his eagerness to convict the lad he even advanced theories respecting the robbery and the disposal of the stolen goods which had no foundation in fact, and which Mr. Eaton had the right to object to; but for reasons best known to himself he allowed the captain to go on until his story was finished. Then by a few well-directed words in the cross-examination, Mr. Eaton so disconcerted the self-important official, that he became confused and contradictory in his testimony, and finally retired from the stand completely discomfited.

Several witnesses were now introduced to show that Ray had been in the village the night of the burglary; that he wore the coat which had been found under the lumber on the wharf, and that he was seen early the next morning wearing another coat. Then Mr. George Woodhull was called to the stand. He seemed somewhat surprised that the prosecution had called him as a witness, but having been put under oath, he readily admitted that Ray had not arrived at Long Point Farm on the previous Saturday morning until nearly eight o'clock; that he came without the coat he had worn away the evening before; and that he seemed in an unusual thoughtful mood all the rest of the day, as though troubled about something. But the first decided sensation of the trial came when the coat which had been found was placed before him, and he was asked if that, in his judgment, was Ray's coat.

"No, sir!" he promptly answered, "I do not think it is."

"Why not?" asked the little attorney, sharply.

"Because," replied Mr. Woodhull, deliberately, and in a voice that penetrated every part of the court room, "Ray's coat had his name on the back of the collar, and this has no name; then, this coat has some time been torn on the right side and neatly mended, while Ray's coat, when he left the farm on Friday night, had no such mark upon it."

This testimony made a pronounced impression upon

the whole audience, for it gave the first hint that had yet been received as to the line of the defense. Up to that moment it had generally been believed that no attempt would be made to show that the coat found was not Ray's; in fact, it was generally supposed that this could not be denied, and that the best the defense could do would be to prove that the boy had lost it previous to the robbery. When, now, Mr. Woodhull so emphatically denied the identity of the coat, the people in the audience looked at each other in amazement, and the witnesses who had sworn so positively just a few moments before that Ray had worn this identical coat now looked as if it had just dawned upon them that there might be two coats of the very same material.

The lawyer associated with the little attorney in the prosecution also seemed to realize that the strongest link in the chain of circumstantial evidence which had been woven around the prisoner was in danger of being broken, for he turned abruptly to the witness, saying: "That will do, sir."

Mr. Eaton sprang to his feet. "Wait a moment, sir," he said to Mr. Woodhull. "I believe you are a witness for the prosecution, and as such I have my right of cross-examination." As no one could deny this right, he proceeded:

"You have stated, sir, that the boy, from his arrival home on Saturday, until his arrest in the evening, seemed

troubled about something. Do you know any reason, apart from participating in this burglary, why he should have seemed so?"

"I object to that question," cried the little attorney, struggling to his feet.

"Your honor," said Mr. Eaton, "the prosecution has taken care to show us that this lad was not himself on his return home; that for some unknown reason he seemed troubled and agitated. Of course, their inference is that he was guilty of the crime he now stands charged with, and that this accounts for the strangeness in his appearance and demeanor. I only wish to show that there was sufficient reason for this behavior without any such supposition as that of his guilt."

"The objection is not sustained," said the judge; and Mr. Woodhull gave his answer:

"I believe there was a threefold reason why the boy should have been troubled. First of all, he was chagrined that I was obliged to do his work that morning, a thing that had never happened before since he came to Long Point Farm; again, he was troubled because he had lost his coat in a way wholly unaccountable to himself or any one else; and, finally, he had recognized the piece of cloth in Captain Gardiner's hand as extremely like the material of which his lost coat was made. And as his name was on his coat, he thought it more than probable, if it were found about the wharf where he

had last seen it, it might lead to his arrest. And even if he were innocent, he had no desire to be arrested for the crime, and have half of the town of Afton believe him guilty. I don't wonder the boy was troubled. I should have been in his case."

"One more question, sir. You have employed the lad for some time; what has been his character since he has been with you?"

"Unexceptionable; I do not know how any one could have done better. Several times he has been trusted with sums of money twice the amount of this theft, and under circumstances when he could, had he so chosen, have run away with it beyond hope of recovery; but there has never been any indication or act on his part that has led me for a moment to distrust him," replied Mr. Woodhull, warmly and emphatically.

The prosecution now rested its case, and the defense began. The first witness called was Ray himself. He promptly took the oath, and then, in clear and distinct tones, told his story. He admitted that he wore on Friday evening a coat of the same material as the one presented there in the court room; "but," said he, "I can readily convince you all that this is not the coat. As Mr. Woodhull has said, my coat had my name on it, and was not mended on the right side, as this is. Again, it does not fit me, as you see." And with a quick movement, he raised the coat from the table, and slipped it on over

the one he was already wearing. Then, turning so that all could see how it hung in folds about him, and holding up his hands, over which the coat sleeves fell, completely hiding them, he asked, with a smile: "Did I look like that when I entered the prayer room Friday evening, or even when I came into your store, Mr. Shephard?" The effect of this object lesson was irresistible, and a hearty laugh was heard all over the room.

He now, with the whole audience suddenly brought into sympathy with him, went on with his story. He told how he had lost his coat, and was obliged to go up to Mr. Carleton's with the old ragged one on that he was seen wearing the next morning. He spoke in detail of his coming down to his boat about midnight, and of his falling asleep in his cuddy. "How I slept through the night without hearing anything of the burglars, I can only explain," he said, "by stating that I was very tired, and by the fact that they probably made as little noise as possible. It was after six o'clock when I awoke, and I did look around the pile of lumber, as Captain Gardiner has testified, but I was looking for my lost coat. I also went up to the store when I heard the commotion, and was there when the piece of cloth so like the material of my coat was found. I admit I was frightened, for I thought the robbers had perhaps found my coat and used it as a blind. This was what troubled me; but I did not dread the arrest so much for myself, for I knew I

was innocent." Then, with some hesitation, "I did dread it, however, because I knew a great many in Afton did not believe I was a Christian, and would at once say I was a hypocrite, and thus I should be made to dishonor Christ, or, at least, would 'become a stumbling block in the way of some who might otherwise accept him, and I couldn't bear that." And the boy burst into tears. Nor were his the only wet eyes in that audience just then.

Amid an impressive silence, and without a question from the prosecution, he was allowed to leave the stand, and Mr. Carleton took his place. His testimony was brief, and simply corroborated Ray's, so far as it related to his coming to the parsonage on Friday night with the old ragged coat on, and his leaving the parsonage just before midnight. Then a young lad named Will Adams, and as mischievous a scamp as there was in town, was sworn, and with a rather sheepish look on his face, he gave in his testimony :

"You see, last Friday night about half-past eight, I was down on the wharf behind a pile of lumber smoking. I was ashamed to be seen with my cigar, and that's the reason I went off down there. While I was smoking away, Ray Branford there came down to the dock, and taking off his coat, laid it on a pile of lumber while he stowed some bags of grain into his boat. I don't know what possessed me,—just the fun of the thing, I guess,—but when he got down into his boat to cover the grain

with a piece of canvas, I just reached up and took his coat, and then ran noiselessly up into the lane way back of Shephard's store. I just enjoyed Ray's poking round in the darkness after that coat, for whenever it lightened I could catch a glimpse of him, and when he went off in that old ragged one up to Mr. Carleton's, I laughed right out aloud.

"I intended to put the coat back on the lumber, or into the boat, but it began to sprinkle some then, and I was afraid it would get wet, so I went up to Shephard's store to wait until Ray came back, and then I was going to give it to him. Mr. Shephard will remember I was there with that coat under my arm, for he spoke to me himself just before he closed up. Well, when the store was closed Ray hadn't come, and 'twas raining so hard, I buttoned the coat under my jacket and scud for home. I hung the coat up in my clothes press, thinking I'd give it to Ray the next time he came up to town. I forgot all about it until Sunday morning at the breakfast table, when I heard father saying Ray's coat had been found, and he was in the lockup for stealing. I thought first I'd tell them I had Ray's coat up stairs, but when he and ma were so sure Ray was guilty, and called him such hard names, I rather enjoyed the situation, and said nothing. Up at church and Sunday-school I heard all the people talking the same way, and thinking I'd produce a sensation in the court Monday morning I kept

what I knew to myself. But when Mr. Carleton on Sunday evening told the people his morning sermon had no reference to Ray, for he then didn't even know he was arrested, and that he had been down to the jail to see him that afternoon, I concluded to tell him what I *knew*. So I went home after the service, got the coat, and took it up to the parsonage and gave it to Mr. Carleton. Here it is now." And taking a bundle from Mr. Carleton's hands, he opened it, and held up a coat before the eyes of all. "You see, here is Ray's name, just as he said, and here is his handkerchief in the pocket with his name on it. There, Ray," he continued, throwing the coat into its owner's arms, "had I known what trouble I was going to make you, I'd never have taken it at all." And without waiting to see whether the lawyers desired to question him or not, he marched down from the witness stand, and sat down upon the nearest bench with the air of one who knew he had created the greatest sensation of the trial.

Mr. Shephard was recalled to the stand, and readily admitted that he had seen the Adams boy in his store Friday night with a coat under his arm. "My mistake," he said, in a manner that indicated his great sorrow, "has been that I did not stop to think there might be two coats of the same material. I am really sorry I caused the prisoner's arrest; this will be a lesson to me always." And when dismissed from the witness box, he

went around to Ray's seat, and shook hands with him, saying in a tone audible to half the audience at least, "My lad, forgive my hasty judgment."

"We have one other witness, your honor," said Mr. Eaton, and called William S. Simmons. A man from the extreme back part of the hall worked his way down to the witness stand. He was wet, and covered with mud, and had the appearance of one who had come far and fast. He being sworn, stated:

"My name is William S. Simmons. I am by profession a detective, and am connected with the city force in P——. I was called here Monday morning to investigate this robbery by the *defense*. An unusual circumstance, I assure you. But Mr. Shephard afforded me every opportunity to examine his premises, and I soon became satisfied that the theory of my worthy friend, the chief of your police here, could not be sustained. The piece of cloth found on the edge of the opening had been to my mind attached there when the burglar crawled out of, and not in through that hole. Then, too, but one track went from the rear of the building down to the wharf, and that returned again, as if the robber had gone down to the pile of lumber simply to hide the coat he had discovered to be torn, and the tools with it. Possibly he may have intended to sink them off the dock, but was interrupted or alarmed in some way, and so hastily placed them under the lumber, intending to

remove them later. No goods were carried away by boat, but they were put through the hole in the partition into the empty store. Then the front door of that store was opened, and the goods were carried away by wagon, while the door was fastened to its place, and the tracks made at the rear of the store for a blind. It is no wonder that this lad slept on all night without knowing of the robbery, for only one of the burglars came anywhere near him, and he only for a brief moment."

"How do you know your theory is any more correct than Captain Gardiner's?" asked the little attorney, with a sneer, in the cross-examination.

"Well," replied the detective, quietly, "my main reason for believing I am correct, is that for two days I have been following the real burglars, and about nine o'clock to-day I bagged them, and the stolen goods, over beyond Holly Mountain. By hard riding I got them into the lockup fifteen minutes ago, and then came over here."

"We rest the case here, your honor," said Mr. Eaton.

The two lawyers on the prosecution consulted briefly with each other, and then the little attorney announced: "In the light of the facts presented by the defense, we submit the case without argument."

Mr. Eaton rose to his feet. "I desire, your honor, to briefly sum up the facts we have presented, in the interest of my client. He is a poor lad, whose reputation and

character are his only possessions. For three days he has been branded as a thief; for three days nearly this whole town has been ready to pronounce him guilty, untried and uncondemned; yea, when, as it now so overwhelmingly appears, he was entirely innocent of the crime with which he has been charged. In justice to him I ask that I may briefly sum up the case."

"We shall be glad to have the counsel do this, your honor," said the little attorney, bowing courteously toward Mr. Eaton.

"The court consents," the judge replied, smiling blandly.

With a bow of gracious acknowledgment to his brother attorney, and to the court, Mr. Eaton began a speech, which for eloquence and pathos had never been equaled in the town of Afton. With that rare felicity of language which had already rendered him famous, he began with Ray's humble attempt to make something of himself. He sketched rapidly the boy's progress until he had reached a position of trust with his employer, and had gained the confidence of many more. He described the boy as he left Long Point Farm on that Friday night for Afton. All grew hushed. Even the heaving breath of the vast audience was still, as he told of the scene in the prayer room, when the lad had talked with God. Then, with sudden transition, he pictured the boy's arrest, and his Sunday in the lockup, while all Afton gave him

no word of cheer, no look of sympathy, no thought of his innocence. In scathing language he showed their want of charity for the lad, their willingness to misjudge his noblest efforts and purest motives, their eagerness to condemn him unheard.

Never had the citizens of Afton received such a stinging rebuke; and, what was more, there were but very few in that vast audience who did not feel it was deserved. None turned from the speaker, lest they should find the eyes of the others fixed in condemnation upon them. Not one thought of judging others, for a still, small voice within was saying, "Thou art the man." When Mr. Eaton had ended, the judge himself wiped the tears from his eyes, and said, huskily: "The prisoner is discharged for lack of evidence to sustain the indictment." Then he hurried down to the bar, and shook hands warmly with the acquitted boy. Others crowded around, either assuring Ray they never really thought he was guilty, or else confessing their error and asking his forgiveness. In the midst of all this confusion General Squire called out: "The judge, lawyers, witnesses, and friends of Mr. Branford are all invited to my house to dinner. Carriages are now at the door; please hasten out to them." And in spite of protests and excuses, they were all carried off to the Squire mansion, where they found an elaborate dinner awaiting them.

But in the midst of all this ovation, a feeling of sorrow

would now and then come to Ray's heart, overshadowing, in a measure, his happiness ; for even then he was aware of what all Afton soon knew, that the burglars at the lockup were his own brothers. He had recognized the coat as soon as he had seen it in the court room as belonging to one of his brothers ; and when the detective announced their capture, he had felt, notwithstanding his own triumphant acquittal, that his heart would sink in very shame. This was the revelation Betsy Branford had made when she called on Mr. Carleton ; but, to shield her, the detective had been put upon the stand, and through his skillful capture of the real offenders, he was able to give in his testimony as though it emanated from himself alone.

The next Friday evening, as Ray sat in Mr. Carleton's study, he suddenly asked :

"Mr. Carleton, why do you suppose God allowed my arrest to take place ? What object could he have had in it ? And what is the lesson I am to learn ?"

Mr. Carleton smiled. "I am quite sure," he said, "we may not know *all* of God's purpose, but some of it we may know. How about your relation to the Saviour?"

Ray answered, quickly : "He sustained me in the greatest trial of my life, and I never loved him or felt his nearness as I do now."

"How about the people of Afton ?" asked Mr. Carleton.

"Well," said Ray, a little mischievously, "I guess,

after listening to Mr. Eaton, they have learned the lesson that 'love worketh no ill.' ”

“They certainly ought,” said Mr. Carleton; “and yet I do not think that either of the things you have suggested constitute God’s chief purpose in this trial.” Then, as though it had nothing to do with the subject, he asked: “What kind of weather had we been having, Ray, previous to the thunder storm of a week ago?”

“Why,” said Ray, in surprise, “it had been for a week cloudy and misty, and nasty and sticky—regular dog-day weather.”

“What cleared it away?” inquired Mr. Carleton.

“The thunder shower,” answered the boy. “It was a terrific one; but when it was over, the sky was clear, the sun shone out, the air was purified, and everything seemed to be wonderfully refreshed.”

“Exactly,” continued Mr. Carleton; “and it illustrates, I believe, what God in this great trial of yours has done for you. Clouds of memory had hung over you from the hour of your conversion—the memory of your past life, of your evil companions, of your old associations. There were many who could not forget them nor overlook them. Then God sent this great trial of your life. It was bitter while it lasted. It aroused the animosity of some; it turned aside for a time the friendship of others, and seemed at one time as though it would overwhelm you. But now that it is over, those clouds of memory have dis-

persed: there is clear sky above your head. I doubt if in your social relations to the people of Afton, or your Christian relations to the members of the First Church, you will ever again hear any allusion to your old life, or ever again have your Christian faith spoken lightly of."

And he never did.

## CHAPTER X.

### FRUIT AT THE MILLS.

“WELL, then, Ray, good-bye until Monday. We shall see you then?” Mr. George Woodhull said, as the boy stepped into a boat at the Long Point Farm wharf, and took up the oars.

“Yes; if nothing happens, you may look for me Monday night after school,” Ray replied, dipping the oars into the water, and pulling slowly away toward Afton.

Four months have passed since the events recorded in the last chapter, and Thanksgiving is just at hand. Those months have been marked by faithful toil on the part of Ray. Immediately after his trial he had taken up his work again at Long Point Farm, and had gone steadily on also with his studies. When September came, and the fall term of school began, he went to the principal of the Afton Graded School, and was examined for entrance to the senior class. The examination was so successful that when Mr. Greenough, the principal, found the boy could not enter the school before the winter term, he himself proposed that he should come up to the village once each week for recitation, and under his own immediate supervision keep on with his class. Ray

had gladly accepted the offer, and, while he neglected no farm duty, he had through all the fall carried on his studies so assiduously that the week previous to the opening of this chapter he had passed an examination which warranted Mr. Greenough's remark a day or two after to Mr. Carleton: "If my other boys don't look out, that young Branford will take their laurels away from them. His indomitable will has carried him successfully through what few boys would have dared to undertake."

Ray's eight months with Mr. Woodhull were now completed, but he had arranged with his employer to live with him during the winter months, doing chores and working on Saturdays for his board, and going morning and night to and from school. This undertaking would have at the very outset disheartened a less courageous lad; still it was not so hard a task as it at first sight appeared. It was not over three miles across the bay to Afton, and in good weather, until winter closed it up, Ray could go over to the village by boat. When once the bay was frozen over, he could skate across; and at the times when he could not do either of these Mr. Woodhull had promised him a horse, and Mr. Carleton had an extra stall in the parsonage barn where the horse could be kept during school hours. Nor would the gallop of seven miles through the wintry air be otherwise than beneficial to the general health of the lad.

So this new arrangement was to go into effect on the

following Monday, when the winter term of school began. Meantime, Ray decided to spend a few days with his old friends at the Black Forge Mills. He had made a few brief visits there during the months he had been away, but this was to be his first extended stay. He had found that, notwithstanding his new associations and arduous cares, there was still in his heart a deep interest for his old friends at the Forge. He had a deep yearning in his soul that many of his old associates might come to Jesus. For them and his immediate home friends he had prayed constantly; but of late he had felt that the gulf between him and them was daily widening.

“I must see them occasionally, and let them see that I neither forget them nor lose my interest in them, if I am to do them good,” he thought. And for this reason he had planned this visit to his old home. He little knew how great the spiritual results of that visit were to be.

It was early morning when he bade Mr. Woodhull good-bye at Long Point Farm wharf. The day was crisp and cold, but pleasant, and he rowed briskly, as he got out on to the bosom of the bay, to keep himself warm. The waves were not high, and under his vigorous strokes the light boat shot rapidly forward. Instead of running into the dock at Afton, he pulled along the shore to the mouth of the stream on which the Black Forge Mills were situated. It was high water, and he was able to

row up within a few rods of his father's door. Pulling the boat well up on the bank, and fastening it securely to an adjacent tree, he walked on to the house.

He opened the door without knocking, and entered. Betsy was busy at the stove, and turned hastily to see who had come. She gave a glad cry when she saw him.

"Oh, Ray! is it you? And you have come to spend Thanksgiving with us, haven't you?" she eagerly asked.

"Yes," he answered; "are you glad I've come?"

"I guess we are; I mean all of us. Do you know, George and the girls have seemed so different lately. They go to the mission chapel with me quite often now, and I hope soon, the girls, at least, will go with me up to the church. Only yesterday we were talking about you, and they all said they hoped you would come home for Thanksgiving. I told them you would. They asked me how I knew, and I told them I had asked the Lord to bring you, and I knew you would come. They laughed and said if you came they would believe God answered prayer, and now they'll have to; I'm so glad."

Ray smiled: "I thought you had been praying for me to come, and as to-night is the night for the prayer meeting at the chapel, we'll try to get them all out. With whom do you leave the children?"

"Some one of us has to stay with them. If you can get all the others to go, I'll stay at home; but if father won't go, and I hardly think he will, then he'll look out

for the children for me. He has done it once or twice lately. He hasn't been drinking near so much since the boys were arrested."

Ray now sat down by the fire, talking busily with Betsy, as she went on with her work, or chatting with the children as they played about the floor. Almost before he realized it was noon, the whistle of the mills blew, and a few moments later his father and brother George and the three sisters came in. He was surprised at the cordiality they all manifested, and when they learned he had come to be with them over Thanksgiving, they all looked over at Betsy and laughed.

"I have told Ray," she said, "and he says you must all go with him to the chapel to-night."

"You will, won't you?" Ray asked, looking around upon all.

Not a single one gave a direct answer, and yet none of them refused to go. The father gave a sniff, but said nothing. George laughed a little, and said: "We might have expected that would be the first thing we'd hear. Betsy and he'll never rest till we are all Christians."

"Never," said Ray, earnestly.

The oldest sister looked over at Ray, a deep yearning manifest in her eyes, and, with some show of emotion, remarked: "It's a very little favor for his coming home."

The younger sisters laughed, and replied in concert: "If you'll be our beau, perhaps we will go."

When the hour came for the service, however, all but the father got ready to accompany Ray. "No, I shan't go," he said gruffly to Betsy's inquiring as to his going; "but you may. I'll take care of the children."

It was but a short distance to the chapel, and on their arrival they found quite a number already gathered. Others kept coming, and soon the room was quite full. It had been the custom for Mr. Carleton, or some brother from the home church, to come down to the Forge and take charge of this Wednesday evening service. But the hour arrived for the meeting, and passed, and no one came. There had evidently been some misunderstanding about the leader, or else he had been unexpectedly detained. Fifteen minutes after the usual hour, Mr. Jacob Woodhull, who was present, came from his seat, to where Ray was sitting. He talked a few minutes with him, and then Ray arose and went quietly forward to the desk. He began the service, and proceeded along in the usual order without the slightest hesitation or embarrassment. His Scripture lesson was the tenth chapter of Romans, and his brief remarks were based upon the very first verse: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." He spoke first of Paul's great anxiety for his own countrymen—that they might be saved. "He *desired* it. It was the longing of his heart. The *desire* because a *prayer*. He could contain himself no

longer. The burden had become too great. He now cried unto God. He did more. Wherever he went we find he first preached that gospel to his unbelieving brethren. He saw to it that they heard the message of salvation, and had the opportunity to accept it *if they would.*"

"Making an application of this truth to myself," he said, "I, as a Christian, ought to desire and pray for the salvation of all of you here at the Forge whom I have been accustomed to associate with; and I do and have. If you only knew how great my anxiety is, how earnestly I have asked God for this very thing, I do believe some of you would come."

As he went on, an earnestness took possession of him which held the fixed attention of that people who knew him so well.

It was a plain, simple talk, but it had a marked effect upon his hearers. From the human side, the very fact that Ray was one of their number led them to listen to him with unusual interest. There was not a single one in that audience who did not know Ray's past life, and not a single one that for a moment doubted the change in him; and when he told, in his quiet, earnest way, what had wrought the change, they gave him their respectful attention. From the divine side, God was working in and through that boy. He spake as "moved of the Holy Ghost." The Spirit taking the circumstances, the place,

the hearers, and the instrument under his control, moved on with a quiet but irresistible power to the accomplishment of his work. And when, at the close of a half hour of testimony and prayer, Ray asked: "Isn't there some one here to-night who wants Jesus for his Saviour?" the fruit of the Spirit began to appear.

From one of the forward seats a great, burly, rough man slowly arose, and electrified those present by the emphatic declaration: "I'm tired of sin. I want to believe in my mother's God." He was known as "Sailor Jack," and his history was a strange one. At the age of seventeen he had run away from a Christian home, and had shipped on board a South Sea whaler. Forty years passed away. The Christian father had gone to his reward. The Christian mother still lived; and, at the ripe age of ninety-four, she awaited her summons home. "I shall not go," she said, again and again, "until Jack comes home. I shall see him once again ere I die, and he will meet me in heaven. God has heard my prayers, and I have the assurance of the answer in God's own time." Finally there came a sickness to the old saint, that the friends gathered about her knew was unto death; but her faith faltered not at all. One evening, as she sat bolstered up in bed, she suddenly seemed to be listening, and then exclaimed: "There is Jack's step. He is at the door. I knew I should see him before I went home." Those about her thought she wandered in mind; but to

comfort her, they went and opened the outer door. A large, burly man who stood hesitatingly upon the steps now entered, saying: "They tell me mother is still alive. May I see her?" Jack had come.

The mother never knew, in this world, the story of that son's wanderings, or the desperate wickedness of his life. She lived only long enough to assure herself that it was her own son Jack, to speak to him of God's promise, and her expectation of meeting him beyond; and then she went on to the heavenly mansion prepared for her. But others soon heard that wayward son's story, and had proof of his evil life and heart. He had sailed on nearly every sea; he had been guilty of nearly every crime. Three months before he had been in the diamond fields of South Africa, and one day had the good fortune to find a number of gems, of a size and quality that at once lifted him from the most abject poverty to comparative wealth. That night, as he lay in his rude tent, his thoughts, for the first time in years, wandered back to the home of his boyhood. As he told of it in after years, a voice seemed to suddenly say unto him, "Go home! Go home!" The next morning he left for the nearest seaport, took the first ship that sailed for England, and from there sailed for his native land, arriving home in time to see his mother die.

Since her death he had gone on in his bold, wicked life, utterly regardless of man or God. Even among the

hard characters at Black Forge he was regarded as a hopeless case. When now he arose in that little meeting, and declared he wanted to believe in his mother's God, there was a hushed stillness not unlike that when the Spirit brooded over the darkness and void at the beginning, and out of which he was soon to call forth light and life. This stillness was broken by Jacob Woodhull dropping suddenly down upon his knees, and with deep emotion asking the Saviour to hear and answer this penitent man's request. They had been playmates together—he and this wicked man; they had sat on the same bench at school. Mr. Woodhull knew of the mother's faith and the mother's prayers for this son. He asked that the hour when that mother's prayers were to be answered might be at hand, and that the mother's mantle might now fall upon the son, making him a living witness of Christ's power to save even the vilest sinner that would come unto him. A number of others, at the close of this prayer, arose and declared their determination to go unto Jesus, who alone had "the words of eternal life," and among the number was Ray's oldest sister.

The next morning Ray and this sister attended the Thanksgiving service at the First Church, and as they started for home at the close of the meeting, Mr. Carleton joined them, and walked a ways with them.

"I owe you an apology, Ray," he said, "for throwing the meeting last night on your hands. By some strange

inadvertence I forgot that I had not provided a leader for it, but it was well. God knew where the one to lead that service was, and I have already learned of the wonderful power he there displayed. This is the sister, I believe, who desired to find Christ. May I ask if she is at peace?"

"Yes, sir," she timidly replied. "Ray talked and prayed with me after the service, and I do feel that I have given myself to Jesus, and that he has accepted me."

"I am very glad to hear it," Mr. Carleton responded, "and I shall be glad to help you in any way that I can, to a fuller understanding of what it is to follow him." Then to Ray: "How about Sailor Jack?"

"He is completely in the dark," Ray answered. "I was over to see him early this morning, and found that Mr. Woodhull had been with him all night, but no light or peace had yet come. His great trouble seems to be that he has already sinned away his day of grace. I wish you might see him; possibly you could help him."

"I will try and see him soon," answered his pastor; "but how about your taking the four o'clock preaching service on Sunday at the Forge? It would be a great relief to me if you would do it, and you seem to have a strong hold upon that people."

For a moment Ray seemed on the point of refusing;

then he asked, softly: "Do you think Jesus would like to have me do it, Mr. Carleton?"

"I think he is always pleased to have us do the work that lies at our hand for him, and which we *can* do; nay, more: I think he requires it of us," said the minister.

"I will do the best I can, sir," replied Ray, humbly.

It was a full house that Ray was called to face Sunday afternoon, for it had become generally known that he was to conduct the service. Even Mr. Branford, Ray's father, had slipped in through the door at the last moment and taken a rear seat, as if almost ashamed to be seen in the Lord's house. Ray conducted the service in a way very similar to that he had followed the Wednesday evening before, only he now talked a little longer, and this time it was from the words: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

It was a helpful, comforting, all-powerful Saviour whom he presented to those listening ears, and not one went away without feeling, that to that young Christian heart, at least, he was all he had pictured him. At the close of the service a number of those who had risen on Wednesday, stayed behind to tell of a new-found hope; but though Sailor Jack tarried with the rest, he, to every question asked him, only answered: "I am shut up in a darkness that is blacker than night. Not a ray of light comes to me. I can only feel I am fast sinking in despair."

“Why not hold another service to-night, Ray?” asked Mr. Woodhull. “It seems to me the interest manifested warrants it.”

“Very well,” replied Ray. And notice was at once sent out among the people announcing the fact, while he went up to the parsonage to apprise Mr. Carleton of the liberty he had taken.

“I am sure you have done wisely, Ray,” his pastor heartily replied. “Very few of the Forge people come up to our service, anyway, and I think myself this work ought to be followed up for a while. Will you give notice that services will be held there every night this week, and that you, on next Sunday afternoon, will lead the services again? I know your arrangements for the week will not permit you to be there, but I will go down, and take some of our church people with me.”

The evening service was not unlike the afternoon one. Ray spoke from the words: “Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

Sailor Jack sat in the front seat, and never took his eyes from Ray while he was speaking. As soon as he had finished, the man jumped to his feet, and turning around so as to face the audience, exclaimed:

“I see it all now. All my life I have been denying

Jesus, and of course he has been denying me; and he isn't going to confess me till I first confess him. So here, now, before you all who know just how wicked I have been, I declare that Christ is the Son of God; that he came into this world to save sinners of whom I am chief. But even I am not beyond the reach of his power. For he has promised, 'him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.'" And he sat down with his face fairly reflecting the peace which had come into his soul.

Ray had hoped that his brother George, and his other sisters might, on this evening, manifest a desire to be reconciled unto God through Christ. Betsy and his older sister and he had all prayed for them, but none of them arose with those who asked the prayers of Christians. While rejoicing, therefore, that others were coming, Ray felt he still had much to keep him humble and prayerful; he could not be satisfied until all of his own home friends had found Jesus.

He was somewhat elated, an hour or so later, to have his brother George come up to his room, for he thought it must be that he had come for spiritual help. When he had closed the door, however, George said in a whisper:

"I came up here, Ray, to talk with you about Tom and Dick; you know, after their examination, they were taken over to the county jail to wait their trial before the higher court."

"Yes," replied Ray, sadly; "I was over to see them

once, but they would hardly speak with me. What of them? Their trial comes off next week."

"No, it don't; for they escaped from the jail Thanksgiving night, and got on to an outward-bound ship for South America before the officers could overhaul them," explained George. "I heard of it only this afternoon, and haven't told any of the others yet."

"I am sorry," said Ray, thoughtfully; "for I had hoped their term in prison might be helpful to them. I am afraid now they will make bad, wicked men. How thankful you ought to be, George, that you didn't go along with them that night!"

"Yes," admitted George; "it was the thought of Betsy that led me to refuse. I tell you, Ray, she is a Christian wife, if there ever was one. I have tormented her awfully, and she has borne it just as patiently as any one could. Never a bitter word out from her. But I'm through with that, and drinking, too." And he whistled softly.

"Why not, George, come clear over to the Lord's side? Do you know, Betsy and I have prayed that you might?"

"Yes," replied George; "I have known it a good while, and, Ray, I do want to come. I wish I had been as brave as Sailor Jack to-night. Won't you pray for me?"

With a glad heart Ray knelt there and prayed for

that brother. Nor did he forget the father and sisters, and the two wayward ones off on the great sea at that hour, fugitives from man's justice, but unable to escape the justice of God. When they arose, George shook hands with him convulsively, and then hastened to his own room.

"Slowly they are coming, Lord, to thee," Ray murmured, as he got into bed. "Give me the faith to pray and labor for all until they too call thee Lord."

The next morning, Ray had a little talk with Betsy before he hastened off to school. He found George had told her of his desire, and the two had a little prayer meeting in that kitchen for him, and the other members of the household still unsaved. Was it strange they arose with the conviction that their prayers would be answered? Not in the light of those words of the Master: "Again I say unto you, That if *two* of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

The answer came speedily, too, for a portion of the household, since before the week was out George and the two sisters came boldly out on the Lord's side; then the brothers and sisters joined their prayers for the salvation of the father, and the two wanderers in a foreign land.

The prayers were heard. The cry of faith always is. But God's time had not yet come.

## CHAPTER XI.

### RAY IN HIS SCHOOL LIFE.

A WAY up at the extreme end of the Parade, and commanding an extensive view of the town and bay, stood the Afton Graded School building. Four stories high, solid, square, substantial was the structure, and through its spacious doors passed daily five or six hundred pupils. Eight departments occupied its pleasant rooms, ranging from primary up to senior, the latter department being a grade higher than the grammar, and yet hardly advanced enough to be called academic. The scholars ranged from the five-year-old beginners to youths of sixteen or seventeen, and were of both sexes.

Mr. Greenough, the principal, was a kind-hearted, just man, a good disciplinarian, and an excellent teacher. For some years now he had been in charge of the school, and under his management it had reached a degree of success never experienced before. Admission to the school, especially in the higher departments, had been eagerly sought for by scholars who lived far beyond the limits of the corporation; and the town authorities, under certain restrictions and for an ample tuition, had consented that a limited number of outsiders should be

admitted. It was under this provision that Ray Branford had the September before entered the school.

But as soon as Mr. Greenough learned that the lad's residence at Long Point Farm was but a temporary one, and that his legal home was still that of his father at Black Forge, he had decided that he was within the corporation limits, and was therefore entitled to free tuition at the school, and to all of its privileges. In this opinion the school board of the town had concurred; and so, with that understanding among all the interested parties, his name had been put on the regular roll of the corporation scholars.

The room occupied by the senior department was on the second floor of the building, and on the south side. The next lower grade, the grammar, occupied the same room also, and the two departments came directly under the care of Mr. Greenough and his two assistants. Consequently, in this room alone, there were nearly one hundred pupils, whose ages ran from twelve to seventeen.

Into this room on the Monday morning after Thanksgiving Ray came for the first time as a scholar. There was a novelty to him in his surroundings, and for a time he felt that every pair of eyes in the room was turned curiously upon him. He could not appear at ease, and evinced an awkwardness quite contrary to his usual, calm self-possession. He also found it difficult at first to study

among so many, and it was well for him that the lessons for the day had been already thoroughly prepared.

In his own immediate class he found some strangers, but the greater part were already old acquaintances; for it happened that Edward Lawton, the son of the president of the Forge Mills, John Bacon, the son of the superintendent, and all the other lads of Miss Squire's Sunday-school class were in the senior grade at the public school. For the most part, too, they gave Ray a cordial welcome—in fact, the only exception was Edward Lawton. He had never been quite reconciled to Ray's position in the class at the Bible school, and he now manifested a similar resentment at Ray's entrance to the senior grade. This resentment, for reasons which will soon appear, steadily increased, and became open dislike before the term closed.

Doubtless the first cause of his resentment had been simply Ray's humble position. He knew his own father was rich, and held a position of influence not only in the town, but throughout the State. This had led him to assume aristocratic airs toward Ray. He continually spoke of him as "one of my father's mill hands," or as "that fellow from the Forge," as though honest toil could belittle the man or his soul. After Ray's triumphant acquittal, he had seemed to accept the inevitable, and treated him with an air of sufferance, if not of courtesy. Possibly this would have continued to have been his atti-

tude toward him in the school, had not a circumstance occurred soon after the opening of the term which brought Ray unconsciously into what Lawton called "a direct antagonism with himself," and thus the old feeling of resentment was not only re-aroused, but was intensified.

At the close of school one day, Mr. Greenough detained the scholars for a few minutes to make, what he called, an important announcement.

"It is generally known to the scholars of the town," he said, "that at the end of the year the school board presents a silver medal to the scholar graduating with the highest rank. But it may not be as generally understood that this medal can be won only by a scholar belonging within the corporation limits, and even then it must be a scholar whose name has been on the school register for the entire school year. In other words, whatever rank an outside scholar may hold, or whatever the rank one may attain who has entered during the school year, the fact that one is without the corporation, and that the other has not been on the school roll for the whole year, will debar each from receiving this honor.

"But the school board, finding that so many have entered the school this term under one or the other of these restrictions, has decided to give them an opportunity to win at least one distinction, and has requested me to announce that a set of Shakespeare's works, bound in morocco and valued at ten dollars, will be given to that

scholar of the senior class, without regard to the time he entered the school, or the place where he may reside, who, in the judgment of the examining committee, shall show the most marked improvement in his studies, the highest average scholarship, and the most perfect deportment. There is but one exception to this competition: the scholar on the corporation roll, who wins the silver medal, cannot also receive the second prize; that must go to the one who ranks next to him, if it should be found that he, in the judgment of the committee, would otherwise have been entitled to it. Here is now a chance for distinction open alike to all, and I trust that there will be such an incentive to all to try for it that a higher excellence will be manifest in our studies, and thus the wisdom of the board in offering the prize be completely vindicated."

After the school was out, John Bacon said to Edward Lawton: "Hey, Ned, it's lucky for you that Branford is an outsider, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?" asked his companion, loftily.

"Because you might lose the silver medal that you are after," responded John.

"Bosh! You don't suppose that mill hand can win a prize, do you?" asked Lawton, with a sneer.

"His chances are good, you can bet!" exclaimed John Bacon, more forcibly than politely. "I only wish mine were as good."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Edward, angrily. "You, like

every one else, seem to think Ray Branford is a prodigy. I tell you, he isn't half as smart as you think."

"Time will tell," remarked Bacon, dryly. "You know as well as I do that he entered the senior grade last September, and that at the end of the term he passed an examination that gave him a place next to you, and a dreadful small per cent. below you. And I have heard that Mr. Greenough said that had Branford been in the class room during the term he would easily have won the first place. Now he is in the class room, and my opinion is that, if he keeps on the whole term in his recitations as he has in the past week, nothing but the fact that he is an outsider will prevent him from taking the honors right away from Mr. Edward Lawton; and that's what the trouble is—hey, Ned?"

"I tell you he can't, and I don't fear him that much." And he snapped his fingers contemptuously; then he turned the corner of the street leading to his home, and hurried away from his tantalizing companion.

He was more annoyed, however, than he cared to show. All the week he had been forced to recognize the fact that Ray had ranked as high in his studies as he, and the fact irritated him. Up to Ray's coming he had easily led his class, and had already begun to look upon the graduating medal as his own. But he knew now, even if he were not prepared to acknowledge it, that if he continued to hold the first place in the class he must

work for it as he never had before; and he resented the fact that it was one whom he so thoroughly disliked that forced him into such a situation. He still believed that the silver medal was his; but if Ray should win the set of books, and show a higher scholarship than himself, there would be little satisfaction in receiving the graduation honor. It would be well known that Ray's place of residence alone had prevented him from taking it.

He entered the house in a sullen and discontented mood, which was at once aggravated by overhearing his sister Daisy's remark to their mother. She was a year or two younger than he, but being in the grammar department was in the same room with him, and had, of course, heard Mr. Greenough's announcement.

"Yes," she was saying, "and a good many think Edward will have to study very hard to prevent Ray from getting the medal."

"He can't get it; he's an outsider," snapped out the discontented boy.

"No, he isn't!" said Daisy; "though he works for Mr. Woodhull, his real home is at his father's, of course, and he was admitted to the school without tuition or restriction. Sadye Greenough told me so."

"Well, he didn't enter until this term," said Edward, desperately.

"Why, Eddie, you know as well as I do, he was admitted in September, and recited every week of last term

to Mr. Greenough. He also passed his examination at the end of the term, ranking next to you," said Daisy, with some show of indignation. "I surely want you to get the medal, but I don't think it is right to make out that things are different from what you know they really are. You ought, with hard work, to easily keep your lead, and I told Sadye Greenough so. But I do think it is remarkable how fast Ray has gained the position he occupies, and mamma thinks so too, don't you, mamma?"

"He certainly has shown rare perseverance, and is to be commended for it. I only hope my son will show a magnanimity and honorableness as great. He certainly is too honorable to want any position, or to win any position except by fair and open means. Much as your father and I want you to graduate at the head of the class, we would prefer that you should be at its foot, rather than have you exhibit a single dishonorable or unmanly trait." Then the subject was dropped.

That the lad had been uninfluenced by his mother's words, however, was manifest by his remarking to himself, as he went to his own room: "I'll win that medal by fair means if I can, but by foul if I must. No drunkard's son shall take an honor away from me."

Meanwhile, Ray, utterly unconscious of the resentment he had roused in Edward Lawton's breast, and with no thought of taking the honors of his class, went quietly forward with his studies. On the principle he

had adopted months before, to do whatever he had to do with all his might, he learned each lesson conscientiously and well. He frequently studied until midnight, and even then rose early enough in the morning to give his lessons a careful review before the time for doing the morning chores. He applied himself to his studies so assiduously, that Mr. Woodhull grew anxious, lest he should impair his health, and one morning as they sat at the breakfast table he spoke to the lad about it. Ray laughingly replied: "One good look at me and the breakfast I am eating would send that anxiety to the four winds; and really, as long as I take the daily exercise I now do, I scarcely see how ill-health can get the slightest hold," a remark that his robust frame and enormous appetite fully justified.

Nor did Ray, in his school life, forget for a moment that other principle he had adopted—that he would ever remember "whose he was and whom he served." He manifested his Christian faith everywhere, not obtrusively or in a sanctimonious way, but so as to command the respect of all. He found time to be often in the prayer room; he occasionally led the Sunday afternoon service at the Forge, with growing unction and power; and he exhibited such a manly Christian spirit and courtesy in his school duties and toward his school associates, that he fast became a favorite with both teachers and scholars, and witnessed among them all silently but powerfully for

Christ. The very positiveness of his own Christian character and faith influenced many a more timid disciple in that schoolroom to a greater boldness and a more efficient service for the Master. He scorned all meanness, he refused to stoop to any dishonorable act, he regarded no school rule or duty as of too little consequence to be strictly obeyed or thoroughly performed. He was full of life, ever ready for any harmless sport or innocent amusement. No one could call his a gloomy Christianity. He made mistakes;—living men always do; it is only dead men who make no mistakes;—but he freely confessed his wrong when it was pointed out to him, nor was he ashamed to ask for forgiveness. So thoroughly marked was his spiritual progress, as well as his intellectual, that Mr. Greenough remarked to his pastor one day:

“That boy constantly calls to my mind the Scripture declaration: ‘Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.’ Just think of what he was, how he was saved, and what he now is. If I mistake not, God has some great work for him to do. I never saw a more striking illustration of divine election, nor did I ever so fully believe in the doctrine as I have since I knew him.”

But during the weeks that Ray had been growing in favor with his teachers and the majority of his school-

mates, there was one who steadily refused to like him. Edward Lawton at first treated Ray with a cool indifference, while he tried, by hard study, to keep the lead over him. Had he studied as conscientiously as Ray, and with the same desire to thoroughly master each lesson, he might easily have kept the supremacy he already held; for he was naturally a talented and gifted boy. But he cared nothing for knowledge in itself, and studied only for the honor of leading his class. Even then he might have succeeded, had he not formed a habit of passing lightly over, or entirely neglecting any point of his lessons that seemed to him insignificant, or likely to pass unnoticed. This superficialness soon manifested itself, as it always will, and in a moment when it was least expected, as it often does. The class was reciting in Latin; and in the passage that Edward Lawton was rendering, an allusion was made to the "swift-footed Camilla."

"Who was she?" Mr. Greenough asked.

The lad stammered and hesitated for a while, but finally confessed that he did not know. The question passed down the class unanswered until it came to Ray, who replied:

"She was the daughter of King Metabus, of the Volscian town of Privernum, and was one of the swift-footed messengers of Diana, accustomed to the chase and to war."

A few days later, a similar incident occurred in the

geometry class. Edward again stumbled over some question he ought to have known, and Ray without hesitation gave the correct answer. Slight as these circumstances were, and free as Ray's heart was from any intentional reflection upon Edward's superficialness, the latter chose to so regard his answers, and talked out of school hours in no gentle terms of "the Black Forge Mill hand who was putting on airs over him."

His ill feeling toward Ray was soon apparent, but only reacted upon himself. Boys love fair play, and they know when one of their number is ill-treated; and whatever popularity Edward had possessed, gradually waned as his attitude toward Ray became known.

No one had been quicker to discern his ill-treatment of Ray than his own sister Daisy, and espousing Ray's cause, she both at home and at school freely denounced what she called "my brother's contemptibleness." Nor had Edward's ill-will for Ray escaped the notice of Mr. Greenough. He at once divined the cause, but as there had been no serious rupture between the boys, and as Ray's bearing toward Edward was ever one of uniform courtesy, he let the affair go unnoticed, hoping that some circumstance would occur that would show the offended boy the unreasonableness of his position, and lead him to change his course.

Affairs were in this condition as the winter term drew to a close. The examinations revealed what was gener-

ally expected, that Ray by a handsome percentage had led the class. When the announcement was made, Edward Lawton went sullenly out from the schoolroom, muttering to himself: "I have led one term, and that Branford one. If I can now lead the other, the medal is mine. Fair means have failed; I'll now try the foul." And allowing every good feeling and noble principle to drop out of sight, he suffered his secret resentment to grow into an open jealousy, and his open dislike into a hateful spite. For early the next term the contemptuous indifference he had at first manifested toward Ray gave place to one of the most persistent systems of petty annoyance one lad ever perpetrated upon another. Well was it for Ray that he had not only read the divine words: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city," but had also by God's grace wrought them into his heart, and made them a part of his daily life.

## CHAPTER XII.

### GOOD FOR EVIL.

THE spring term of the Afton Graded School began the last week in March, and as Ray expected early in April to begin another season's work for Mr. Woodhull, he did not think it worth while to attend school at all that term. But when at the close of the winter term he spoke to Mr. Woodhull about it, that gentleman asked :

“ You still desire to push on in your studies, Ray ? ”

“ Yes, indeed,” responded the lad ; “ but I thought I might perhaps arrange to recite to Mr. Greenough once a week, as I did last fall, and at the same time keep on in my work for you.”

“ That certainly can be done, if best,” Mr. Woodhull answered ; “ but I have talked with Mr. Greenough, and Mr. Carleton, and Uncle Jacob about it, and they all deem it wisest for you to keep in the schoolroom this next term if you can.”

“ Why, of course I *can*,” replied Ray, hesitatingly ; “ but I also wanted to be earning what I could this summer, for I would then have enough, with what I have saved of my last year's wages, to enter some good academy this next fall.”

“That’s your plan, is it?” asked Mr. Woodhull, smilingly; “well, we can easily arrange that. Here are two weeks of vacation, and I’ll let your work begin now. The days are constantly growing longer, and you will be able to do more mornings and nights than heretofore. Your going up to the village each day will enable you to attend to all the marketing, and save me that trouble. Suppose now we begin to-day, and I allow you ten dollars a month until school closes, and your twenty-five dollars a month after that until you enter school again. How does that suit you?”

“I think I ought to be satisfied,” replied the grateful boy. And he then and there determined that his benefactor should have no occasion to regret the generous offer.

When school began Ray was in his accustomed place, much to Edward Lawton’s disgust, for he had secretly cherished the hope that his antagonist, as he called him, would be obliged to recite privately to Mr. Greenough that term. When he found, however, that Ray had begun the term with the intention of keeping on to the end, his rage knew no bounds, and he resolved upon the scheme of petty annoyances already alluded to. An opportunity, too, to vent his malice, and at the same time to put Ray to great inconvenience, was right at hand.

The weather was still cold, and the ice on the bay was hard and firm. Ray, taking advantage of this circum-

stance, had come over to the village on his skates. Those skates were the pride of his heart, for they were of the real "Acme all-clamp" pattern, and had been presented to him the Christmas before, by Mr. and Mrs. Woodhull. He had found a constant use for them during the winter, and had been accustomed to hang them in the coat room with his hat and coat, during recitation hours. They had never been molested, and with no thought of their being injured, he on that morning hung them in the usual place. His astonishment and grief may well be imagined, then, when at the close of school he took them down, to find the clasps broken, and even the runners themselves injured. There was no hope of fixing them even; they were broken absolutely beyond repair. Suppressing the cry of indignation that came to his lips on discovering the despicable trick, he put the broken skates under his arm, and hurried out of the schoolhouse. But the quick eye of Daisy Lawton had noticed his pale and excited face, and a glance at the skates as he tucked them under his arm told her the cause. She hurried from the schoolroom as quickly as he, and then ran breathlessly up the street.

With mingled feelings of indignation and sorrow, Ray walked slowly down the street. He was indignant that any one had dared to perpetrate so dastardly an act, and sorrowful that any one could find it in their heart to do him so great a wrong. He tried not to accuse any one,

but in spite of himself, the malignant look Edward Lawton had given him early that afternoon would come back to him. "He is the only one I know of in the whole school who would feel like doing the cowardly deed," he said to himself, more in pity than in anger; "but no one shall learn from me that the outrage was ever committed." Then a peaceful look came over his face. "I can, at least, pray for him, and maybe I can in some way show him that I am his friend."

He hastened to the post office for the mail, and then went on to Mr. Shephard's store on an errand, that gentleman and he being now most excellent friends. Then he went on down to the wharves. He gave a sigh as he stepped on the ice, for he thought of the broken skates under his arm. "It's all the difference between twenty minutes and an hour in getting home to-night," he said, and proceeded slowly out from the shore. A moment later some one called him, and he turned around to find Daisy Lawton standing on the dock.

"Come here a minute please, Ray," she said.

He retraced his steps, carefully arranging his skates so that she would not notice they were broken, and wondering how he should explain why he had not put them on.

His wonderment was immediately dispelled, for she took a pair of skates out from under her cloak, and extended them toward him, saying:

"Here, Ray, take these; I know yours are broken, for



Black Forge Mills.



I saw you in the coat room. I am not sure any more than you who did the mean trick, but I fear it was Edward."

As Ray hesitated to take the proffered skates, she quickly added: "These were Brother Herbert's, who, you know, died last year. I have mamma's permission to lend them to you, and they are just like your own."

Ray took the skates reluctantly, and put them on. Then he said: "I don't believe, Miss Daisy, any one but you knows that my skates were broken, and we are not sure that it was Edward. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt, and keep this matter between us. He shall know no difference in my treatment of him."

Tears came to her eyes, as she answered him: "I was going to ask you to promise that, and you have done it without my asking. It was Eddie's good name I was thinking of. Will you let me have your broken skates? I will keep them safely, and no one but mamma and ourselves will know about this, until the real offender confesses his act."

He handed the skates to her, and with a pleasant "good-night" glided rapidly off toward Long Point Farm.

If Edward Lawton was surprised the next morning when Ray entered the school yard with a pair of skates in his hand so like the broken ones that he could not tell the difference, he was even more surprised to find

that day after day went by without any one's speaking of the dastardly deed. "Ray thinks by keeping quiet about the affair he'll find out the sooner who did it," he finally thought, "but I'll show him he is mistaken."

He refrained, however, for some time, from doing anything that would call special attention to the perpetrator, and contented himself by creating those little annoyances liable to occur in every school. Ray's books were mislaid, his pens and paper mysteriously disappeared, examples were erased from his slate, and a dozen other things, equally annoying, happened to hinder him in his work. Ray suspected at the outset who was guilty of these things, but he manifested no difference from first to last in his courtesy toward Edward. Nor could these things be entirely concealed from the other members of the class, and they, too, suspected the perpetrator, while they all wondered that Ray bore the annoyances so patiently, and evinced no desire for retaliation.

So matters went on for a number of weeks, and then another marked evidence of Edward Lawton's spite occurred. Mr. Greenough had, with this term, adopted a new custom. On each Friday the senior class reviewed the studies of the week. One Friday morning after the school had begun, Mr. Greenough called the attention of the algebra class to certain examples he had placed upon the blackboard, requesting that each member of the class perform them, and, copying them neatly on paper,

hand them in to him when they came up to recite in the afternoon.

“These examples merely illustrate principles we have studied this week, and I shall expect each one of you to hand them to me,” he said. “If you have not performed them when the class comes up for recitation, you must remain after school until they are completed.”

Before noon Ray had worked the examples, and copying them upon paper, he folded them neatly, and laid them in his algebra. In the afternoon when the class was called, he found they were no longer in his book. He turned over his books hurriedly, but could not find them, and then came forward to his class with a look of embarrassment upon his face. When Mr. Greenough asked for his paper, he said:

“I worked the examples this forenoon, Mr. Greenough, and placed them in my algebra, but I cannot find them now. Possibly I have mislaid them. May I return to my desk and see?”

A look of annoyance passed over Mr. Greenough's face, but he gave the desired consent. Ray returned to his seat, looked thoroughly on and within his desk, opened every book, and then, with chagrin clearly depicted in his countenance, returned to the class.

“I cannot find them,” he said; “but I certainly performed them.”

“It is strange,” said Mr. Greenough, a little impatiently,

looking at Edward Lawton and not at Ray as he spoke, "it is strange, Ray, that you who are usually so careful in everything else should so often mislay, just at the moment of recitation, that which is most necessary to the success of your work. Possibly your paper may have dropped upon the floor, and some scholar has found it. If so, I trust he will be honorable enough to hand it to me before the close of school. If not, I see no other alternative: you must remain after school and perform the examples again."

"Yes, sir," replied Ray. And the recitation was resumed.

At the close of the school, Mr. Greenough informed Ray it would be necessary for him to remain. Daisy Lawton lingered a moment after the other scholars had gone, and came over to his side.

"This is too bad, Ray!" she said.

"At almost any other time," he replied, "I should not have cared about it; but as this is Friday, and Mr. Woodhull is away, it is a little annoying that I must remain."

She did not care to hinder him in his work, and so left the schoolroom and went off slowly toward her home. As she reached the corner of the street on which she lived, her brother Edward was just ahead of her. He saw her, and paused a moment, as though he would wait until she came up. He changed his mind, however, and

hurried on to the house. As he entered the door he pulled his handkerchief from his pocket; something white came out with it, and, caught by a current of air, it fluttered down to the walk. He went on into the house without noticing it, and Daisy, as she reached it, stooped down and picked it up. It was Ray's copy of the examples.

She stood for a moment undecided what to do, then she turned and sped back toward the schoolhouse. Reaching it, she entered and hurried up to the senior room. Scarcely ten minutes had elapsed since she left, and Ray could not have performed a quarter of the examples. Hurrying over to his desk, she laid the paper before him.

"I found it," she said, simply, and then colored violently, fearing she had not told the whole truth.

He understood her at once, and spared her any further confession. They were alone, Mr. Greenough having requested Ray to leave the examples at his house when he went down to the wharf, and had then hurried away to meet some engagement.

"Please let it remain between us that this paper was ever found," he said, gravely. And strapping up his books he accompanied her down to the street. At the gate they parted, each carrying away a heavy burden. She grieved that her only brother, whom she had believed, until recently, to be noble and manly, should be guilty

of deception and theft, for she could give his act no lighter term; he, sorrowful that he should so unintentionally be the cause of another's sin. But both believed in the power of prayer, and from their hearts there went up a common cry that God would lead the offending one to the only source of permanent reform.

The weeks passed swiftly by, and the month of June came. Two weeks more, and the school year would end. Ray, notwithstanding every hindrance thrown in his way by Edward Lawton, had steadily advanced in his studies, and there was little doubt in the minds of teachers or scholars but that he would carry off the honors of the class. Ned Lawton himself secretly admitted it, and his only hope now was to win the second prize; but even of this he was not entirely sure, since among the outsiders there were one or two who ranked nearly if not quite as high as he. Then a thing happened which nearly took away from Ray even the possibility of graduating, and removed the second prize completely beyond the slightest hope of Edward Lawton's securing it.

Ray, at the close of school, had hurried off to do the errands entrusted to him, for huge clouds and a low muttering of thunder in the west indicated a storm, and he was anxious to get well off on his way toward Long Point Farm before the tempest came. His errands finished, he hastened down to the boat to find, to his surprise, that it was gone. On inquiring of an old sailor

who frequented the wharf if he had seen any one take the boat, he, taking his pipe from his mouth, had replied:

“That white craft that belongs to Woodhull over yonder? I seed Lawton’s boy get into her a half hour ago, and go off down the bay.”

There was then but one thing to do, and Ray immediately did it. Leaving his bundles in a neighboring store, he started off on his seven miles’ tramp down home. It was six o’clock when he reached there, and before he began his chores he went down to the point to see if he could see his boat anywhere down the harbor. Though he could not discover the vessel, he noticed one thing that rendered him anxious for its safety. Heavy clouds were already covering the sky, and there was every indication that the storm would soon burst forth.

A half hour later it suddenly grew dark, the lightning flashed sharply, followed by terrific peals of thunder. In the distance could be heard the roar of the wind and rain, which were fast approaching. Ray, followed by Mr. Woodhull and the hired man, left the barn where he was at work, and ran down to the little wharf near the house. He soon descried the boat quite a distance down the bay, but it was evidently making directly for the point. The only question was whether it would reach there before the squall struck.

Ray and his companions watched anxiously the boat’s progress. A few minutes later it had arrived nearly

opposite the point, and sheered around to run inside of it. They could now see Edward Lawton's face, as he, pale and frightened, watched the coming storm. Evidently he knew his danger, and was doing all he could to reach the shore before the tempest struck. Five minutes more, and he would be safe; would the squall hold off so long? No; it is coming; the trees on the point bowed before it, and the next instant it struck the boat. For a moment the little craft stood up bravely before the gale, and then as a tremendous gust struck it, it careened, struggled to right itself, then fell heavily over upon the tossing waves.

Through the heavy rain that was now falling, the anxious watchers looked for the boy, and they soon discerned him clinging in his desperation to the overturned boat. Another moment, and Ray sprang into the dory that lay at the wharf, and before he could be prevented, had seized the oars, and pulled off toward the unfortunate boy. The wind was in his favor, and though the dory was tossed like a cockle shell upon the waves, he slowly approached the capsized boat. It was evidently a hard struggle, but with bare head, and resolute face, the noble lad pulled on. Now he reached Edward, and with great difficulty drew him into the little boat.

The storm lulled for an instant, and, laying his exhausted companion down in the dory, Ray took advantage of the circumstance, and turned the tossing craft for

the shore. Half the distance, under his vigorous stroke, was gained, when the wind, changing a point or two, swept down in greater fury upon them. It is seldom such a gust of wind is experienced in northern latitudes. Trees were overturned, the water was dashed high into the air, and even houses were unroofed, by that terrible blast. When it had passed, Mr. Woodhull arose from the ground to which he had fallen, and look for the dory. It lay capsized a few rods away, while Ray, with one arm supporting the unconscious form of Edward, was struggling to reach the shore. But his strength soon failed, and the huge waves rolled within the reach of Mr. Woodhull and his hired man—for both rushed into the angry waters—two unconscious forms.

An hour later, Mr. Woodhull, on a foaming horse, dashed up to Dr. Gasque's office, at Afton. Ten minutes after, the doctor drove his fleetest horse off toward Long Point, while Mr. Woodhull went on to Mr. Lawton's house. That gentleman and his wife, entering a close carriage, drove rapidly off through the raging storm after Mr. Woodhull, who had already turned his horse toward home. That was all Afton knew that night.

But the next morning, on Dr. Gasque's return home, the whole story came out. To the question anxiously asked on all sides, "How are the boys?" he gave the same answer :

"As well as could be expected under the circumstances,

for I tell you both had a narrow escape. Edward Lawton can probably be brought home the first of the week. Ray will have to keep his bed a little longer. The boat, when it capsized, or some rock as he swam in with his exhausted comrade, has given him a fearful blow on the head. We shall pull him through, however."

Perhaps it was not intentional, but many a one at the First Church the next day thought of Edward and Ray, as Mr. Carleton read the words:

"But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."

They knew later also how peculiarly applicable those words were to Ray's heroic act.

On the following Monday, Edward was brought home; he immediately sent a note to Mr. Greenough asking him to call after school. When he came the boy made a full confession of his wrong doing.

"I have told Ray all of this," he added, "and have his forgiveness; I wish now to acknowledge my wrong doing to you, though I know it will prevent my taking any honor at the coming graduation. I am willing to do whatever you think is right, and will make any acknowledgment to the school that seems to you to be proper."

Mr. Greenough laid his hand on the repentant boy's head: "You have already suffered much, my boy," he said, kindly, "and are so ready to acknowledge your wrong, that we will make it as easy for you as we can. I will talk the matter over with the school board, and will let you know later our decision. Will you and Ray be present at the examinations?"

"Yes, sir. I think so. Dr. Gasque says if we keep quiet all this week, he will let us come to school again next Monday, and that will be in time for the examinations. I want the boys to see that I don't hate Ray any longer, and"—lowering his voice, and speaking almost timidly—"I am going to try and love the Saviour, too. I shudder every time I think how near I came to the other world without the shadow of a hope. I am so thankful that Ray saved me."

Mr. Greenough shook the lad's hand warmly. "I am rejoiced to hear you say this," he said, and then he hastened away.

On the next Monday morning the two boys came into the school yard at an early hour arm in arm. A quiet, peaceful, satisfied look was on Ray's face, but Edward looked the proudest and happiest. They were greeted with three rousing cheers by their schoolmates, as they passed on into the schoolroom. They sat together during the examinations, and Edward looked with a hearty smile of congratulation at Ray, when it was announced

that he was to be the valedictorian. It would not be known who was to have the second prize until the close of the graduating exercises.

There was much speculation among the scholars as to the one who would receive it, for it was known that Edward Lawton was no longer eligible to it. Mr. Greenough had himself acknowledged this at the commencement of the examinations. He had made a brief statement of the lad's wrong doings, and his desire to acknowledge them before the school, concluding: "He has seemed so thoroughly penitent for what he has done, that the school board has simply decided to give him fifty demerits for his acts; but this will so affect the record of his deportment, that even if his scholarship should warrant the bestowal of the second prize, he will be debarred from receiving it." To whom, then, the handsome copy of Shakespeare's works was to go was a secret known only to the examining committee.

Wednesday, the graduating day, dawned bright and fair. During the early morning there was much hurrying to and fro by many feet, and when half-past ten came, the hour for the beginning of the exercises, Afton Hall was filled to overflowing with the Graded School pupils and their friends. On the spacious platform, which was beautifully decorated with flowers, were the members of the school board and of the examining committee, the teachers of the school, and the graduating

class. The first speaker was Edward Lawton, and with an air of conscious pride he took his place, for he knew that the position assigned him virtually declared him to be second in rank, even though he could not hope to receive the second prize. He acquitted himself creditably, and returned to his seat amid tremendous applause. Other speakers and essayists followed in rapid succession until the last speaker, the valedictorian, was reached.

With the straightforward, manly air so characteristic of him, Ray Branford began his address. His theme was "The Maid of Orleans." He emphasized her divine call and mission, and in his parting words to his classmates impressed upon them the importance of obedience to the same divine influence.

Then the prizes were awarded. The chairman of the school board, a Mr. Wardwell, arose, and having congratulated the teachers upon the successful issue of the school year, called, "Ray Branford!"

Ray would hardly have been human had there not been some exultation in his heart, as he went forward to receive the silver medal, the highest honor of his class; but when he turned to retrace his steps to his seat, and saw Edward Lawton's bright, happy look, he felt he would have gladly surrendered it, were it possible, to the boy who once had hated, but now so loved him.

"John Bacon!" was called next. Pale with astonishment, he arose and went forward. Mr. Wardwell held

the beautiful copy of Shakespeare in his hand, and having explained to the audience the circumstances under which this second prize had been offered, he continued:

“Ray Branford, as the recipient of the silver medal, our highest honor, was debarred from receiving this, though his progress in his studies, his high scholarship, and perfect deportment, would otherwise have entitled him to it. It is also no more than just to Edward Lawton to state that his scholarship entitled him, as the next in rank, to this gift, had there not been, through circumstances I need not repeat here, an imperfect record in his deportment. This fact alone carries the prize to the next in rank, who is, I am glad to say, one of our corporation scholars, Mr. John Bacon.” And he laid the handsome volume in the bewildered boy’s hands, who stammered out his thanks, and then returned to his seat.

“Edward Lawton!” said Mr. Wardwell. The boy, who had been nodding pleasantly to John, rose suddenly to his feet, and with some hesitation went down the platform. Could it be there was a third prize? Yes; for a package had just been handed to Mr. Wardwell, and rapidly undoing it, he held another beautiful book in his hand. As Edward reached him, Mr. Wardwell, turning to the audience, said: “I have stated that the imperfect deportment of Master Lawton prevented him, in the judgment of the committee, from receiving the second prize. But when he so nobly confessed his wrong,

and manifested such marked penitence, the committee decided to give a third prize. This copy of Milton's works, of equal value with the copy of Shakespeare, was purchased, and I now present it to Master Edward Lawton in recognition of his high scholarship, and of the manly acknowledgment of his faults which he has made."

With glad, happy tears filling his eyes and coursing down his cheeks, Edward received the volumes. He felt that the honors conferred upon him had been greater than he had deserved, and in his intense emotion he could only bow his thanks. The diplomas were now presented, and with that act the senior class ceased to be, while the other seven departments of the school each advanced a grade, and gave place for a new primary.

There was another event shortly after that brought deep joy to many interested ones. Edward Lawton united with the First Church. In the relation of his experience he alluded to the night that he had clung so desperately to the overturned boat in the storm.

"I saw my sins, then," he said, "as I never saw them before; and when on recovering consciousness some hours later I found the one I had most injured had been my rescuer, it brought forcibly to my mind my relations to the great Saviour. All my life I had been wronging him, yet he had given himself for me. In gratitude, then, I hastened to him, and placed myself, I believe, in his protecting arms forever."

Daisy Lawton's class in the Sunday-school was near Miss Squire's class, and on the day Edward united with the church she, as the school repeated together the golden text for the day, looked over to Ray and smiled. The words were: "Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE STRIKE.

“**I** DO not see how we can do differently. It is simply a choice between shutting down the mills altogether or reducing the wages of the help. For the sake of the employés we have chosen the latter alternative. The whole board of directors is agreed in this, so you will please see that proper notice is given. Make the time August first.” It was Mr. James Lawton, the president of the Black Forge Mills corporation, who spoke, and then he went slowly from the mill office to his waiting carriage.

“Yes; of course,” replied Mr. Bacon, the superintendent of the mills, following the first-named gentleman out on the sidewalk, “I do not see what else can be done, but—” and he dropped his voice so that the driver of the carriage should not hear him—“I fear there will be serious trouble. Ever since there have been rumors of this reduction things here have been in a state of ferment. Hyde, Blake, Willis, and some of the other department overseers have been talking to the help, and many of them have already gotten the notion that they are mis-

used. This reduction of their wages may prove to be the last straw, and the help may go out in a bunch."

"Well, we shall know what to do then," remarked Mr. Lawton, dryly. "If the help cannot see that a half loaf is better than no loaf, they must go without any bread, so far as we are concerned. For myself, were it not for the suffering it must bring to these families, I would prefer to shut down at once." And entering the carriage he was driven rapidly away.

It was early in the month of July. The great business depression which had for some months been carrying havoc all over the land had now reached Afton. Manufacturer after manufacturer had already failed, and for several months the Black Forge Mills had been run at a heavy loss. The directors, all of them kind-hearted, Christian men, had done their best to stem the adverse tide, and, for the sake of their employés, to keep the mills running on full time and at full pay. But the time had at last come when one of two things must be done: the mills must be shut down, or else the cost of running them must be reduced. Thinking only of the help, who could ill afford to be without employment, they had, the night previous to the opening of this chapter, decided upon the reduction of wages which Mr. Lawton had just announced to Mr. Bacon.

The directors knew that their decision would create much dissatisfaction, but they had hoped that a fair and

candid statement of the condition of the mills, and a direct appeal to the good sense of the help to accept smaller wages, rather than no wages at all, would prevent any serious trouble. But they overestimated the good judgment of their employés, and forgot how easily a few hot-headed leaders could transform a dissatisfied people into a frenzied mob.

A few days later, following out the instructions he had received, Mr. Bacon caused the following notice to be conspicuously displayed about the mill premises :

#### IMPORTANT NOTICE.

For six months the Black Forge Mills have been run at a serious loss to the corporation, and at last the directors have been forced to one of two issues : Closing the mills, or reducing the expenses.

For some time the board has hesitated as to which of these measures it would be the wiser to adopt. So far as the interests of the corporation are concerned, it would be better to shut down the mills at once ; for the employés, however, it is certainly better that the mills should continue to run, even though they should receive less compensation for their work. This latter consideration has led the directors to finally decide to keep the mills running. But in order to do so they are compelled to announce that on and after August 1 there will be the following reductions on the present wages :

A ten per cent. reduction on all wages of one dollar and under.

A fifteen per cent. reduction on all wages over one dollar and under two dollars.

A twenty per cent. reduction on all wages of two dollars and over.

At the same time, they assure all who labor for the corporation that, the moment the present financial depression is over, there will be an immediate return to the present rate of wages.

Per order of THE DIRECTORS.

"That's all gammon—hey, George?" asked a great strapping fellow, named Blake, of George Branford, as he passed him in the mill, pointing, as he spoke, to one of the notices which was posted near them.

"I hardly think so," replied George, good-naturedly; "we all know that the times are hard. Half of the up-town mills are already shut down, and I have been fearing something of that kind might happen here. For myself I am thankful it is nothing worse than this."

"Get out!" exclaimed the man, angrily; "any one but a fool can see this is only done to hoodwink us into a complete submission to their wishes. I for one am tired of being ground under the heel of a soulless corporation."

"You have a right to leave any time, I believe," George quietly answered. "No one compels you to work here. The corporation tells you what they can afford to give for your work; you may take it or not as you choose. I have faith in the statement of the directors. They are all Christian men, and I don't believe they intend to grind us under their heels. Rather, I believe, did we know the whole truth, we should find that they, even with this reduction in our wages, will sacrifice somewhat to keep us in work."

"Oh, yes; I remember now, we are a Christian, too," said his companion, with a sneer; "and, of course, we must stand up for our brother Christians, even when they grind us to death."

"I have not been ground to death as yet," went on George, ignoring the thrust at his religious faith, "nor do I believe the corporation intends to bring me to that tragic fate. If we refuse to accept this reduction, the mills will stop, and we shall be worse off than we would be on the small pay."

"No, we won't," replied Blake, eagerly. "Don't you see if we all agree in this thing, we shall force the corporation to keep right on at the present rate of wages? All we want to do is just to stand by each other, and we can have our own way in this thing."

"No, I don't see it," answered George, shortly, "and you can count me out of any such arrangement." Then he resumed his work.

He and a few others in the mill who thought as he did about the proposed reduction soon found themselves, however, entirely ignored by the rest of their associates; and it was speedily evident that some movement was being agitated of which they could only conjecture. Knots of men gathered here and there at the close of each day's work, and talked earnestly, often excitedly together. Men lingered longer at the saloons, and drank oftener from their cups, while faces grew dark and sullen at each new view of the notices posted so conspicuously around them.

Mr. Bacon quickly discerned these changes, and felt sure that trouble was coming. As rapidly as possible,

but quietly, lest his purpose be suspected, and the open rupture between himself and the help be hastened, he brought the affairs of the mills into a condition for an immediate closing.

This came, as he had anticipated, on the first morning of August. Going down to his office at an earlier hour than usual, he found the mills deserted. The great engine was motionless; not a piece of machinery manifested life; it was like a Sunday in the vast shops and yards; while on the street corners and about the neighboring saloons were groups of noisy, insolent men, who were evidently waiting for his coming.

Taking in the situation at a glance, Mr. Bacon entered his office, to find his bookkeepers and about a dozen of non-striking men, anxiously watching the outside throng.

"I want some one to help close and fasten up the buildings and yards," he said, promptly and resolutely. "Those of you who may fear to compromise yourselves with your companions are at liberty to retire. On the other hand, those of you who are willing to assist me, shall be well paid for your trouble. Who now will volunteer?"

Every man stepped forward.

Rapidly Mr. Bacon issued his orders. "Go out of the back door of the office, and swing to the gates, and bar them in place. Then scatter among the buildings, fastening down the windows, lowering the shutters, and locking the doors. While you are doing that, I will hold the

angry crowd at bay in front of the office. As soon as you have finished your work come back here, for I may need you." And as the men hastened away to do his bidding, he fearlessly threw open the front door of the office, and stepped calmly out to meet the crowd of excited men, who were moving down toward him.

They grew less turbulent as they drew near, and found the yard gates closed, and the superintendent on the office steps, picking his teeth with the utmost unconcern, and looking down unflinchingly into their excited faces. He certainly was not afraid of them, and their oaths, and shouts, as they came on, had failed to intimidate him in the least. His coolness and bravery had a visible effect upon them, and they became silent as he pleasantly remarked :

"You seem unduly excited this morning, my friends ; may I inquire what your trouble is ?"

Hyde, the leader of the crowd, a man of almost giant size, stepped out from the others a few paces, and insolently answered :

"We've come to demand what is our right, and we propose to have it peaceably if we can, but forcibly if we must."

"What is your right ?" asked Mr. Bacon, calmly.

"That there be no reduction in our wages whatever," answered the fellow, boldly ; "that we be allowed to return to our work at old rates."

“And suppose we refuse, what then?” inquired Mr. Bacon, with some show of interest in his tones.

The silence that followed was prolonged and oppressive in its intensity. Hyde evidently was nonplussed at the way he and his followers were received. Mr. Bacon had, however, asked a fair question, and he was waiting patiently for an answer.

Hyde was too keen-witted to make any threat, and thus render himself liable to an immediate arrest.

“We claim this as our right, and intend to maintain it to the end,” he finally replied. “We shall refuse to go to work until our demand is granted.” And a murmur of approval could be heard among his followers.

“My good fellows,” said Mr. Bacon, in clear, ringing tones, “you have entirely misunderstood the attitude of the Black Forge Mills corporation toward you. The reduction in your wages which was to go into effect to-day was made not because we desired to make it, but because we could not prevent it. For six months the corporation has gone behind at the rate of four thousand dollars a month. The reduction we propose would save us but three thousand; but that you might have work, the corporation was willing to loose the one thousand each month. They much prefer to close the mills, but for your sakes took this way to keep them open. Your persistency in your demand will only force upon them the other alternative. From this hour, unless you yield,

the Black Forge Mills will be closed; when they will open again, I cannot say. Think well, then, before you persist in your unreasonable demand. If, however, this should be your decision, we shall to-morrow be ready to pay the wages due you in full. I am also instructed by the directors to announce that you may occupy your homes, free of rent, until October 1st. This is the best we can do for you under the circumstances."

There was a resoluteness about Mr. Bacon that carried conviction with his utterances, and the leaders of the strike consulted together as to their next move. While they were in consultation, Mr. Bacon stepped back into the office, to which his small band of helpers had already returned. They announced everything as secure, and gave him the keys to the buildings and yards. "Please wait until I can dismiss my visitors," he remarked, somewhat dryly, "then I have further work for some of you."

He was now loudly called for by the crowd, and went boldly out to meet it.

"Mr. Bacon," said the leader, more respectfully than he had yet spoken, "we have no doubt of your sincerity, and we know that you are simply acting in accordance with your instructions, but we have decided to make our appeal directly to Mr. Lawton himself."

"That is your privilege," replied Mr. Bacon, kindly; "but let me suggest that you send a committee to wait upon him, instead of going with your present numbers."

But the crowd refused his advice, and moved off in a body toward Mr. Lawton's residence. There was telegraphic communication between the office and town, and Mr. Bacon, with characteristic promptness, sent a message to both Mr. Lawton and the captain of the police. When, then, the strikers reached Prospect Avenue, on which Mr. Lawton resided, they found their progress checked by a squad of armed policemen, and only a delegation from the throng was permitted to pass on to an interview with the gentleman they sought. A half hour later, completely baffled in securing any concessions from the president of the corporation until he had consulted with his directors, they returned to their waiting companions, and, angry and sullen, the mob slowly dispersed.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bacon had placed his faithful allies in charge of the mill property, and driven off up town. A directors' meeting had been called at ten o'clock that morning in anticipation of this very trouble with the help. The meeting was a long one, for the problem the directors tried to solve was how to still conciliate the employés, and arrange for their best interests. The decision finally was to attempt a compromise with the strikers by lessening the per cent. of reduction. An extra force of police was, however, secured as a precautionary measure, and sent down to the Forge to protect the mill property, and to keep the peace until the compromise was effected.

All attempts at a compromise on the part of the

directors during the long weeks that followed, were, however, unsuccessful. The help, inspired by a few hot-headed leaders, who pointed out to them that these concessions on the part of the corporation were a sign of its yielding, strenuously demanded full pay before they would return to work. It now seemed probable that the mills would remain shut down for an indefinite period.

But when October came, Hyde, and Blake, and Willis, and some of the other instigators of the strike suddenly left the Forge, apparently for new places of labor. The mill corporation, therefore, ventured to put its property into a condition for starting, and placards announced that on the first of November work would be given all who were willing to accept the reduced wages. No sooner were these notices out, however, than Hyde and Blake re-appeared at the Forge, and a few days later huge posters were stuck up on every side, threatening all who accepted the offer of the mill corporation. It became evident, therefore, that the mills could not be re-started on the plan proposed, without great risk to both property and life; but as the work of putting the mills in readiness went steadily forward, it seemed probable that the corporation would take that risk.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### GEORGE BRANFORD'S HOME.

A LOW sigh, that was all, but the quick ears of Betsy Branford heard it, and she looked toward the table at which her husband, with bowed head, was sitting, and then a heavier sigh escaped her own lips. She sat in a low rocker near one of the windows of their humble kitchen, paler and thinner than usual, for at her feet was a cradle in which a babe of only a few weeks lay. The babe slept quietly, however, and after that sigh escaped her, she turned and gazed out of the window and off toward the hills, with the same troubled look that had been in her eyes all the morning.

George was in great trouble just then, but the change that brought it was small compared with the change in him, wrought since the winter before. Having once accepted Christ as his Saviour, he had gone manfully about his daily duties amid his old temptations and associations, and in spite of jeers and ridicule he had kept the faith. He had grown wonderfully in grace also, and he and Sailor Jack had become fast friends, and had more than once knelt together and prayed for the Master's blessing upon the Black Forge people.

What a difference it makes in a man when he is "clothed and in his right mind"? Betsy Branford would have told you that she could scarcely believe herself that this strong, manly, sober, industrious George Branford, was the wild, reckless, drinking, ungodly man whom she had called husband so short a time before. He was so strong in his faith, too; so sure that God heard and answered prayer, that she had, even in these few months of his Christian life, come to lean upon him, and to look to him for help in her own religious growth. When, now, he happened to be cast down and discouraged, her own heart grew weak, and her faith failed.

What was the trouble? Why this—and no wonder the strong man grew faint for a moment: the last morsel of food in that house had been eaten that morning. Not a mouthful remained for that frail mother; not a mouthful for the little children; not even a drop of milk for that sleeping babe. Nor was this extreme want due to any fault or neglect of that strong, manly husband. The little that came to him when the Forge Mills shut down had been carefully husbanded. He had used his money only for the barest necessities of life, and he had earned every cent he could during the weeks the mills had been still. But with hundreds of idle men seeking and clamoring for work, there had been but little for each one, and the pay for that little was meagre indeed, and soon exhausted.

It was a large family, too, for one pair of hands to provide for. Mr. Branford, Sr., ever since the strike, had hung about the saloons, and the little he earned went into the rum-seller's till, or was whiffed away in smoke. He came around to the house, however, for his meals, and uttered many a bitter oath if he was obliged to go away without them. Then there were the three sisters, all Christians now, and practicing self-denial in every way, and ready to do any honest work; but they got little, and this was their only home. Even now they had gone out to the hills with Betsy's older children, hunting for chestnuts that bright October morning that they might sell them for bread. Of those older children there were three, and now in the cradle lay a fourth; and then there was the wife and mother, and lastly the strong, hearty husband and father. Ten mouths in all! Is it any wonder that with his scanty work and scantier pay, and with his most rigid economy, too, they had now reached a condition of absolute want?

When the placards had announced the possibility of the mills starting up early the next month, new hope had come to George Branford's breast. This struggle with absolute want would be short, and soon over now, he thought. He had met Mr. Bacon, in fact, only a few days before, and that gentleman, stopping him, had asked:

"George, do you feel competent to take charge of

the jack rooms, in case we start up the mills next month?"

"Yes, sir," George had promptly answered, a great hope filling his heart.

"Well, then, we'll book you for that position; but I'll see you again," Mr. Bacon had pleasantly replied, as he drove on.

This had meant more to George than you and I can realize; it would be the best position and the largest pay he had ever received in his life. One of the sisters could stay out of the mill now, and help Betsy with the children and the housework, and it would be so much nicer for them all. So he had built his day dreams for those he loved, and his heart had swelled with gratitude toward God, who was dealing so graciously with him. But this morning all those dreams and hopes had been rudely dashed to the ground. The huge posters instigated by Hyde and his followers had appeared, and it was rumored that now the mills would not start up at all. For the first time, then, in all those weary weeks, George had become despondent, and his despondency fell like a dark cloud over his poor wife's heart. Without a word they had for an hour sat there, she at the window and he at the table. He had not meant that his low sigh should be heard. He had struggled hard to suppress it, but for his life he could not keep it back. Perhaps it was the best thing he could have done, however, for when Betsy

looked over at him, and a heavier sigh escaped her lips, he aroused himself. A Bible lay on the table before him. He opened it listlessly. Was it chance that his eye immediately rested upon these words: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not"?

He read the words aloud, and to Betsy, who had not even noticed that he had raised his head, they came with a suddenness and power that brought back her faith in God with a quick rush that overflowed her heart.

"Oh, George!" she exclaimed, rising and coming hastily over to his side, "how could we doubt God so, just as though he could not even now give us all we need and more?"

"You are right, darling," he said, resolutely. And with her he knelt there, and together they asked God to forgive their lack of faith, and to give them a trust that would leave all things temporal, as well as spiritual, in his hands. They rose from their knees greatly comforted, and walked over to the window together.

"There is Bill Davis' boat!" exclaimed George, suddenly, as his eye fell on the rude dory hitched in the brook near the house. "I believe I will borrow it, and go down the bay clamming. There will be a good tide a little before noon. Then if the girls get some nuts they can exchange them for crackers, and we shall be provided for to-day."

“Why not go down to Long Point—that is a good place for clams; and then you can see Ray?” asked Betsy.

“I’m afraid he will insist on knowing how we are situated here at home,” replied her husband, “and will make me take some money. You know when you were sick he made me take ten dollars, and then when here two weeks ago he left five dollars with you. It seems too bad to take his money when he is working so hard to get an education.”

“Your going to Long Point won’t make any difference about that,” said Betsy; “for if he don’t see you before long, he will surely come here. He knows well enough that you have hard work to get along, and he said to me when here that he ought to bear his part of the expenses in this crisis just as much as you.”

“I know he feels so, and his willingness to do for us forms one of the very reasons why I want to receive as little help from him as possible,” replied George. “But Long Point is a good place for clams, and I will go down there, since you have suggested it. It may, perhaps, be the way in which the Lord is going to answer our prayers.” And getting his basket and hoe, and putting on a pair of heavy boots, he prepared to go.

Before he left the house, however, there came a knock at the door. On opening it, Mr. Jacob Woodhull stepped in, with a large pail in his hand.

“How are you, George? How do you do, Mrs. Branford? Fine day! I was going up town, and thought I would bring you along a pail of milk,” he said, extending the pail he carried to George. “When you have three or four of those fellows,” and he pointed at the cradle, “milk always comes in handy.”

“Indeed, it does; and you don’t know how thankful we are for it,” Betsy answered, while George went into the pantry to empty the pail.

“Perhaps I do now,” the old gentleman replied, with a smile.

A moment later the husband and wife were alone. They looked at each other a few moments, and then George slowly repeated the words: “Call upon me, and I will answer thee.” “God has begun to answer us already, Betsy,” he said, gently and reverently. Then kissing her and the sleeping child, he left the house.

He had no difficulty in securing the boat, and soon was pulling rapidly down the bay. An hour later he landed on Long Point, and, as the tide was already well out, he took his basket and hoe and began his search for the delicious bivalves. The tide proved to be a favorable one, and his basket was nearly full, when a voice suddenly exclaimed:

“You have done well, George; but I’ll show you a quicker way yet, and we’ll fill your basket. Then you must come up to the house and take dinner with me.”

It was Ray who spoke, and with a six-tined fork in his hand he came down the bank to meet his brother. They shook hands cordially, and then Ray, with a few turns of his fork, threw out enough to fill the basket to its utmost capacity.

“There, now, pull your boat up, and secure it against the incoming tide, George, while I cover these clams over with rock weed and set them up there in the shade. Then we’ll go up to the house,” said Ray.

As they walked along, Ray questioned George as to the family, and soon learned the condition of things at the old home. He also learned for the first time of the threatening placards that had been put out, and the probability that the mills would not start, after all.

“I tell you what it is, George,” Ray said, as they drew near the house, “I am coming up to the village to-morrow evening, and will come on down home for a while. We’ll then talk these matters over, and see what the outlook for you is. But give yourself no anxiety as to the future. I told you long ago I stood ready to help you. The trouble is, you in your unselfishness have wanted to carry this burden alone, and I selfishly have allowed you to do it. Ten mouths are a good many to satisfy, and for the next month you must let me bear the whole burden.”

“But you know you have helped me already, Ray,” said George, “and I knew how anxious you were to go

to some good school this fall, so I tried to get through with the burden as well as I could, without letting you know about it."

"You great big unselfish brother!" replied Ray, tears coming into his eyes. "I shall help you, nevertheless. God can provide a way for me to go to school, if that is his will."

After dinner, Ray accompanied George back to the boat, wheeling on a barrow two bushels of nice potatoes. Having placed them in the dory, he handed George two dollars, saying: "This is all I have by me now, but it will last you over to-morrow. I will get more of Mr. Woodhull when he comes home this evening, and to-morrow night I will bring you enough to pay your rent and keep you running until the mill starts up. If anything prevents that, we'll see what else we can find for you to do."

George wrung the generous boy's hand until he winced with the pain, and then, entering his boat, pulled with a light heart off toward home.

The next evening a high wind was blowing directly down the bay, and heavy clouds covered the sky; so Ray drove around to the village. Putting his horse under one of the First Church sheds, he did his errands, and then walked on down to the Forge.

George and he were soon so busy talking over the family affairs, and the prospect of the mills starting up,

that he took no notice of the lapse of time, and was surprised when the clock struck eleven.

“Well, George,” he said, on rising to go, “if the mills start up on the first of November, I should accept the position Mr. Bacon has offered you. It is your right, and I should leave the result to God. Possibly this threatening of Hyde and the others is all bluster, and if they find that they cannot intimidate the corporation, they will back down, as they did in July. I heard up at the village that the managers knew where they could get all the men they wanted, and that they really intended to start in November with a full force.”

“I hope it may prove so,” answered George, “but father was in this noon, and he declared the mills would never start again. He is thick with Hyde and Willis, and ought to know what they are about.”

“Time alone can tell,” replied Ray, “but here is the money I promised.” And he handed George thirty dollars, and his three sisters and Betsy five dollars each. “I have some more yet which I have saved, and you shall have every dollar of it if necessary.” And to avoid their profuse thanks he hurried out of the house.

As he turned the corner and came on the main street, he heard a step behind him, and glancing quickly around he caught sight of a figure hurrying off in the darkness. He needed no second glance to enable him to recognize that stooping figure, and slow, shuffling gait as belonging

to his own father, and a desire to know where he could be going at that time of night led him to turn and follow slowly along behind him.

He had not far to go, for his father turned up the first side street leading toward the mills, and soon stopped before a small building. Ray knew it was a low groggery, but the shutters were down, and the place seemed to be deserted. He found a moment later, however, that such was not the real case, for at his father's knock, the door quickly opened, and he entered.

"That means a night of wild carousing, with companions as reckless as himself," said Ray, bitterly, as he turned to retrace his steps. "O Lord," he then cried, "wilt thou not bring him soon to a knowledge of thyself?"

As he turned on to the main street again, he glanced back along the passage way. The door of the saloon was now open, and in the light that streamed forth he recognized the four men who suddenly came out and went on up the alley toward the mills. They were his father, a man named Smith, and Blake and Hyde, the leaders of the strike. He also heard some one in the groggery call out to the men as they hastened away: "Come back here, boys, as quick as possible."

What could the men be going to do? A dark foreboding of some great evil came to Ray's heart, as he noiselessly followed on after the four men. Were they about to commit some crime? He did not dare approach

too closely, lest his presence should be discovered. And when he reached the tall fence forming the mill yard he had lost sight of them. He listened, but heard no steps; he could not even tell which way they had now gone. He remembered that a ways down that side of the fence on which he was standing there was a small door leading directly to the mills, but it was seldom used. He would go down as far as that, and see if it was closed. He soon reached it, and found that it was firmly fastened. He breathed easier. Perhaps the men were only out on some drunken frolic, after all; and provoked at himself for his needless apprehension, he hurried back to the main street, and went almost on a run up town. When he reached the hill he went more slowly, and at its top he turned and looked down upon the village below.

Silence and darkness reigned everywhere. The wind blew terribly, and sent the chilly night air to his very bones. He could not tell why he lingered there, but he did with his eyes fastened upon that part of the darkness which he knew hid the great mills from his sight.

Suddenly he gave a great start. He had seen a glimmer of light down near the largest mill. It grew in brilliancy, and then lights flashed forth from three other buildings in the mill yard, and streamed up into the air, fanned by the fierce wind. He could not be mistaken. The Black Forge Mills were on fire, and in that high wind no human power could save them.

## CHAPTER XV.

### FIRE AT THE MILLS.

RAY acted instinctively, and so did the most natural thing under the circumstances. Screaming "fire" two or three times at the top of his voice, he ran swiftly down the hill toward the mills. Nor did he keep upon the street up which he had just come; but, jumping over the nearest fence, he took the most direct line for the burning building. In three minutes he had reached the east fence of the mill yard, and ran along it, looking for some place to climb over. He had a vague notion that if he could only reach those flames before they got under too great headway, he might subdue them.

The fire had not yet gained sufficient force to afford him any light, and he ran along in the darkness until he suddenly struck against a ladder reaching to the top of the fence, with force enough to send it to the ground with a loud clatter, while he fell headlong over it. Before he could rise to his feet, he heard a voice that he knew only too well, saying, apparently from the top of the fence near him:

"The wind has blown down our ladder, boys. I just heard it fall. We shall have to jump. Hurry up."

Then the speaker leaped to the ground and hurried away. A moment later a second man followed, then a third, and a fourth. The last, however, had evidently jumped from a position a little farther along the fence than his companions, and, stumbling over the crouching lad as he leaped, both rolled on the ground.

"Hang it all, Smith; I thought you had gone on. Did I hurt you?" remarked this person, rising to his feet.

No one could mistake that gigantic form, even in the darkness. It was Hyde, the leader of the strike. For answer Ray rose and sprang fearlessly upon the man, trying to throw him, and to hold him down. With an exclamation of astonishment, the giant threw one arm around the plucky boy, holding him as in a vise. Then he passed a hand over the lad's smooth face. A cry of dismay now leaped from his lips, and with a savage oath he flung his victim, with no gentle force, back against the fence, and immediately disappeared.

Ray lay where he had fallen for a brief moment, confused, and sick at heart. He had recognized all four men. The first had been his own father, the second Blake, the third Smith, the last Hyde; and they, beyond any possible doubt, had set fire to the mills.

But he could now hear the crackling of the flames, and already the light was beginning to throw its rays over upon him. If this fire was checked, he must act at

once. He crawled to his feet, and, as fast as he was able, hurried off toward the main street.

Had the mills been running, there would have been ample power, and a full supply of hose right at hand for checking the flames, the corporation having always depended upon itself in such emergencies. Whatever help was secured now, however, must come from the Afton fire department. Ray knew this; and his purpose was to reach the nearest fire box, and sound the alarm.

He had some distance to go, and he cried out "fire!" "fire!" as he ran along, hoping to arouse the Forge people. Not a window opened, however; not a man appeared. "There are enough who hear me, and know of it," he said to himself, indignantly, "but they don't wish to respond." Just at the foot of the hill on the main street was the nearest alarm box. Opening it, Ray gave the knob a quick jerk. It came off in his hand. The connecting wire had been cut; and no alarm from that box could be sounded.

"They mean to make thorough work of the mills to-night," he muttered. "No alarm can now be given without going clear to the central station." And for the second time that night he dashed off up town at his greatest speed.

Ten minutes elapsed before Ray could reach the central station, arouse the slumbering firemen, and have a general alarm sounded; and the destroying flames, fanned

by that terrible wind, gained during that time a hold upon the mills that it was impossible to check. As soon as Ray had seen the first engine and hose cart go off toward the Forge, he ran on to Mr. Bacon's house, much farther up town. He succeeded in arousing that gentleman; and, having told him of the fire, he, at Mr. Bacon's request, went on to Mr. Lawton's residence. At his first ring, a window in the second story was thrown up, and a voice that Ray knew to be Edward's asked:

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"Tell your father, Ned, that the Forge Mills are on fire!" exclaimed Ray, with some show of excitement.

"Oh, it is you, is it, Ray?" responded Edward, no less excitedly. "Hold on a moment, and I'll tell father, and then join you. We'll go down together."

Ray was only too glad to take a brief rest after his long run, and sat down upon the steps until Edward appeared.

"I told father; and he and mother and Daisy have gone to the west windows, where they can see the flames quite plainly. But as father is not well to-night, he will not go down," he announced on joining his companion. Then, as they went on down the street together, he asked:

"How came you to know of it, Ray?"

"I came up to the village to-night, and went on down to the Forge for a while. I stayed longer than I meant to, and it was between eleven and twelve when I started

up town, where I had left my horse. From the top of the hill I noticed a light in the mill yard, and watching it I saw that it was a fire. Then I ran back down there, trying to arouse the people, and to send an alarm from the fire box; but I found the wire had been cut, and so had to come back to the central station to give the alarm. From there I went to Mr. Bacon's house, and at his request I came to yours," explained Ray, briefly, not caring to tell his companion any more.

"It's the work of Hyde and his followers, fast enough," went on Edward; "but I wonder where the watchman was that he didn't give the alarm?"

"I don't know; I never thought of that," replied Ray, with a sickening fear at his heart, for he wondered if the four men had added the crime of murder to that of arson.

They had now reached the brow of the hill above the Forge, and had an uninterrupted view of the fire. A single glance showed that all the mills were doomed, and that the firemen would have all that they could do to keep the flames confined to the mill yard. It would have been a grand sight were it not for the devastation and ruin it brought. The mill yard contained about an acre, and taking all the buildings within its precincts, they numbered twenty. Every one of these was on fire, and the yard had the appearance of one solid mass of flames, which leaped into the air, as though defying the dark

clouds that hung over, and threatened soon to drench them. The sombre background reflected the rays, so that for a long distance around the smallest object was plainly visible.

"It is just terrible, isn't it, boys?" asked a voice behind them, and they turned around to see Mr. Carleton. "I don't think I ever saw a fire that seemed so greedy, so eager to devour everything before it as this," he continued; "were you going down nearer?"

"Yes, sir," replied both lads, and they accompanied him down the hill, Edward meanwhile explaining how Ray had discovered the fire, and given the alarm.

"There can be little doubt that the fire is an incendiary one, and probably was instigated by the strikers," Mr. Carleton remarked. "When will men learn that they cannot make wrong right, nor help on their own interest by violence? The loss is going to be a terrible one." Then, more softly, as though to himself, "I wonder if even *this* wrath of man shall praise HIM?"

They found on reaching the foot of the hill that ropes had been stretched across every street leading up to the burning mills, and that policemen were holding the vast crowd back from a nearer approach; so they stood there for some time watching the firemen as they heroically fought back the advancing flames, until a sudden and providential change of the wind revealed that the tenement houses would all be saved.

Mr. Bacon found them here, and questioned Ray more particularly as to his discovering the fire. The lad told his story freely, omitting only that he knew who the incendiaries were; and when he had finished, Mr. Bacon asked:

“You saw nothing of Jones, our watchman, then, and he in no way gave the alarm?”

“No, sir,” replied Ray; “and I didn’t even think of him until Edward spoke of it. It is strange.”

“It is, indeed,” said Mr. Bacon. “I got the firemen to look around the mill yard, but they could find no traces of him. I fear he has perished in the flames.”

“There’s a light in his house up yonder on the hill—shan’t I go up there and see if he’s there?” asked a small boy who stood by.

“Yes, if you will,” assented Mr. Bacon, glancing off toward the house.

Mr. Jones, the watchman of the mills, was a stout, honest fellow, who lived all alone in a cabin half way up one of the hillsides. It was a singular circumstance, if he was not at the house, that a light should be there, and for this reason Mr. Bacon had thought it best that the boy should go.

The youngster darted away toward the cabin, but ten minutes later came back with big, staring eyes, declaring that Mr. Jones was there, but was bound to his bed, and couldn’t move hand or foot, or speak a single word.

At this startling information, Mr. Bacon, Mr. Carleton, Edward Lawton, Ray, and two policemen, hurried off toward the house. On arriving there they found the man bound hand and foot, a wooden gag in his mouth, and utterly unconscious. While the men released the unfortunate watchman, Ray and Edward started up town for a doctor. They went to Dr. Gasque's office first, but the servant girl who answered the bell said that the doctor had just been summoned to Mr. Lawton's, who was seriously ill. Edward, at these sad tidings, hastened home, while Ray continued his search for a physician. He finally found one, and accompanied him back to Mr. Jones' house. The doctor administered restoratives, and after a half-hour the man regained consciousness, and a little later could tell his story.

While doing his chores, preparatory to his departure for the mill, he had been suddenly seized from behind and dragged down to the ground. He was then bound and gagged, as he had been found, and carried into the house and laid upon his bed. He had not recognized any of his assailants, and soon sank into the state of unconsciousness from which he had just been aroused.

Mr. Bacon and Ray left the house together. Finding on their arrival at the Forge that the fire was under complete control, they continued their way up town. As they went along toward the village, Mr. Bacon remarked:

"The watchman's condition, and your finding the wire

of the alarm box severed, Ray, shows that there was an organized plan to burn the mills. Of course, we know the strikers are at the bottom of the disaster, but we must, if possible, ascertain who the real perpetrators were that they may be punished. The Black Forge Mills corporation is ruined beyond recovery. When the strike occurred in July, more than half the insurance companies canceled their policies; quite a number of the other policies have expired since then, and the companies would not renew them under the existing circumstances. I believe, as an actual fact, only two policies of five thousand each were still in force, and we may have trouble to collect even them. So, you see, the fire to-night gives no possible hope of the mills being rebuilt by the present company. Some of our stockholders will by this fire lose every dollar they possessed."

They had now reached the corner of Prospect Avenue, and Mr. Bacon turned to go up to his home. Just then a man came rapidly toward him.

"Mr. Bacon," he said, "Mr. Lawton is dead, and the family would like to have you come to the house at once."

"Mr. Lawton dead!" exclaimed Mr. Bacon and Ray together.

"Yes," replied the man. "You know he has long been troubled with the heart disease, and had been quite unwell all the evening. When he was told of the fire,

he got up and went with his wife and daughter to the west windows of the house and watched the flames for some time. All at once he said to his wife: 'There are only two policies in force on the mills, Ida, and the company is ruined.' And then he sank unconscious upon the floor. His wife and daughter got him back to his room, and sent for Dr. Gasque, but before the doctor arrived he was dead. 'Heart disease and over excitement,' the doctor says it was, and the family have sent me to find you. I just came from your house, and, as your family know I'm looking for you, you may as well go right on to Mr. Lawton's."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Bacon. And he went off with the man to the bereaved household, while Ray got his horse and drove off to Long Point Farm.

He arrived there just at dawn, worn out with his strenuous exertions, worried at the terrible loss of the mills and the consequences it involved, and sorrowful for the sad calamity that had befallen the Lawton family. But this was not all the burden he carried. Greater than they all, and involving a greater responsibility so far as he was concerned, was the crushing secret buried deep in his own bosom. He also knew who it was that had set fire to the Black Forge Mills, and a single word from him would bring upon the perpetrators of the outrage the justice which they so richly deserved.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WHAT IS DUTY?

RAY now entered into a struggle with himself—a struggle so long and so bitter that it well-nigh overwhelmed him. His reason and his conscience were arrayed against his pride and his heart, and for a long time it was extremely doubtful which would be victorious. Not that Ray realized this to be the actual condition of things just then. No; he was honest when he thought that his struggle was over the question: What is duty?

But he could have easily known what duty was had he only allowed himself to use his sanctified common sense; but he so wanted duty to lie in just the opposite direction from what it really did lie, that he very readily made himself think there might be some question about it; and thus he entered into a struggle that tried his faith, destroyed his peace of soul, and surrounded him with a darkness blacker than night. He never could recall that spiritual experience without a shudder. He came so near grieving the Spirit and dishonoring the Master's name.

He knew that the men who had set fire to the Black

Forge Mills, no matter who they were, should be punished for their crime. He knew that to know who the guilty parties were, and then to refuse to disclose that knowledge, made him in the eyes of the law an accessory after the fact. He knew that to allow the criminals to go unpunished was really to countenance their deed. At least, had he allowed himself to prayerfully reason the matter out, he would have known all this.

But one of those criminals was his own father, and to him it seemed to make a vast difference in the case, or, at least, he wanted it to. He would not have hesitated a moment to disclose who the guilty men were, had not his father been one of the number. Duty would have been very plain then, and he would have at once admitted that it would be absolutely wrong to shield the incendiaries from the punishment they so richly deserved. But his own father! His heart rebelled against disclosing a single thing that would show his own parent to be a criminal in the eyes of the law. No matter if that father had willfully made himself a criminal, how could he, the son, disclose the fact? What little love and respect he still had in his heart for that father made him unwilling to do what seemed so terrible a thing.

Then, too, a little pride had, unconsciously perhaps, come into his heart, and influenced him greatly in his trying to believe that his duty might be to keep silent. He did so want the Branford name redeemed from the

evil reputation that had gathered about it. George and his sisters, as well as he himself, were now all trying to live honest, upright lives. This was a great deal. But there were two other brothers who were fugitives from justice ; how could he add a third name, and that his father's, to the criminal list ? He could not reveal the names of the other incendiaries without his father's becoming known. Was it not, then, duty for him to hide his shameful secret so deep in his own breast that it should never be discovered by other eyes ?

We can understand his position, and sympathize with him. We can see how he could easily persuade himself that this might be his duty. But an earnest desire to get at the real truth, leads us to ask—was it his duty, after all ? I am very anxious that we should all have clear ideas of what one's real duty is in a case like this ; for there is so much condoning of crime in this our day, and so much covering up of sin, even by those who call themselves Christians, that it is time God's real children should pause, and ask themselves, prayerfully and earnestly, whether they have a right to shield any crime, or excuse any sin, simply because the guilty party happens to be one whom they have loved, and one whom they cannot bear to have branded guilty. Sooner or later all condoning of evil, and all concealment of crime will return in accumulated measure upon our own heads. The principle is wrong ; the results must be evil. God

himself never condones sin. He forgives on true repentance; he never condones. Let us ever remember it is never right to condone sin. By so doing we shall destroy our religious peace, and may surround ourselves with a spiritual darkness in which there is no light.

Ray saw this later on, and understood why it was that he found so little enjoyment in his religious life; why the prayer room brought him so little comfort, and even the reading of God's word had not its usual delight. For the present, however, he hid his secret in his bosom, and tried to persuade himself that he was doing his whole duty. The old question, however, was ever reasserting itself. When it seemed most settled, it had a strange way of suddenly reappearing in some new and startling form.

For example, a week or two after the fire a circumstance happened that lulled Ray's conscience into a perfect repose for a while. Hyde, the leader of the strikers, was arrested, charged with the crime of firing the mills. Ever since they were burned, an expert detective had been quietly working up the case, and had found evidence enough it was said, to warrant the arrest of Hyde. Ray now thought his whole trouble was over.

His complacency was destined to be rudely shaken, however. Hyde waived an examination in the lower court, and was remanded to jail to await the action of the grand jury in November. Ray met Mr. Bacon

about this time, and ventured to ask him what he thought of Hyde's arrest, and the prospects of finding the other criminals.

"There is little hope of accomplishing anything by his arrest," Mr. Bacon had replied. "It is even doubtful whether with our present evidence we can convict him. He is a hardened fellow, and will never reveal his companions in crime, even if he is himself convicted. I have been informed that he has secured one of the best criminal lawyers in the country. And I should not be surprised if he were acquitted, unless we discover new facts." And Mr. Bacon, with a deep sigh, walked on.

Ray looked after him a few minutes, almost tempted to follow, and disclose what he knew. But he again resisted the impulse, and with a sore heart went sadly down the street.

Stopping at the post office for Mr. Woodhull's mail, Ray was surprised that a letter for himself was handed out with the rest. He seldom got a letter, and this bore the postmark of a large city, a hundred miles away. Who there could have written to him? There was nothing on the envelope to give him the desired information, and so he hastily tore it open. There was an ordinary sheet of note paper inside without printed heading of any kind. On the sheet, however, these few lines were scrawled :

W——, Oct. 30, 18—.

MR. RAY BRANFORD,

Dear Sir: Will you come to my office in this city, on Thursday, Nov. 4th, at 10 o'clock? There is an important matter upon which I wish to consult you.

Yours truly,

JAMES R. GREGORY,

27 Powell St., Room 3.

*Attorney and Counsellor-at-Law.*

Ray puzzled over this letter. He showed it to Mr. Woodhull. No explanation of its meaning occurred to either one, but on the morning of November 4th, Ray took the first train for the designated city.

He arrived there about half-past nine o'clock, and used the next half hour in looking for the specified street and number. He reached the desired block just as the clock in the neighboring tower struck ten, and though no lawyer's sign was over the door, he went up the narrow stairway, and along to Room 3. At his knock a voice promptly responded, "Come in."

Opening the door, he entered a large room, evidently only temporarily occupied, for its sole furniture was a small table and three chairs. At this table sat two men, one large and stout and smooth-faced; the other small, and almost a fop in his dress, with a pair of enormous glasses over his sharp, piercing eyes.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said Ray, advancing toward them.

"Good-morning," they both responded, pleasantly,

while the little man arose and placed the vacant chair for Ray to occupy.

"Mr. Ray Branford, I presume?" he then said.

"Yes, sir," replied Ray.

"I am Mr. Gregory, who wrote to you, asking you to honor us with your presence," the little gentleman went on, "and this is my friend, Mr. John Wilson."

Mr. Wilson arose and shook hands heartily with Ray, saying, "I am very glad to see you, sir."

Completely mystified by the marked cordiality of both men, who were entire strangers to him, Ray took the offered chair, remarking:

"I believe you had some matter you wished to talk over with me."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Mr. Gregory. And then he manifested a lawyer's proclivity, by beginning such a series of questions as to well-nigh take away Ray's breath.

He commenced by asking Ray where he had been living two years before, and then followed along until he had a very fair idea of the boy's history during that period. He seemed satisfied with Ray's answers, as though they were just what he had expected. Then he suddenly asked:

"You have formed the very laudable purpose of entering some academy this fall, and securing an education, had you not, Mr. Branford?"

"Yes, sir; I had thought of it," admitted the astonished lad.

"May I ask if you have the means for carrying out this proposed course of study? I ask as a friend," he added.

Ray could not understand the man's purpose in asking such a question,—nor, in fact, any of the questions he had so far asked,—but he had no real objection to telling him just how he was situated, so he replied:

"I did have enough saved to defray my expenses for a year at school, and was intending to have entered some academy last September; but owing to some unexpected expenses, I had to delay my going for a time. Perhaps I shall not be able to go until another year." And he gave a deep sigh, for no one but himself knew how hard it had been for him to give up his pet scheme.

"I suppose you would be very glad to earn money enough to enter school, say this coming winter term, and pursue those studies through without interruption to a full graduation?" Mr. Gregory now asked.

"I rather guess I would, if I could do it honestly," answered Ray, his eyes brightening at the very thought.

The two men looked at each other significantly a moment. Then Mr. Wilson arose and went to the door of the room. Opening it, he looked up and down the hall, listening intently. Satisfied at last with his examination, he closed and locked the door, and came back to

his chair. Both gentlemen now drew their chairs a little closer to Ray's, while Mr. Gregory asked, with a peculiar emphasis upon his words :

"Mr. Branford, where were you on the night the Black Forge Mills were burned?"

Ray gave a great start. How much did these men know of that night's work? What was their purpose in asking? He finally answered, though with manifest hesitation :

"I was there at Black Forge."

"Were you not the very first to discover that fire?" Mr. Gregory asked, a little sharply.

"Yes, sir," replied Ray.

The lawyer fastened those piercing eyes upon the lad, and inquired slowly and distinctly :

"Have you any objection to telling us where you were when you first saw the fire, and where you immediately went upon discovering it?"

Ray colored a little, but otherwise was perfectly calm, as he answered :

"I at present see no reason why I should tell you."

The lawyer smiled and changed his tactics.

"Mr. Branford," he said, "let us understand each other. I ask these questions, not in the interest of the prosecution, but in the interest of the defense, at the coming trial. Mr. Hyde is my client, and it is at his request I have sent for you. You will, of course, be sum-

moned by the prosecution, and we have reason to believe that you might prove a very damaging witness, in case you told all you know about the Black Forge fire. We respect the motives that have so far kept you silent concerning what you do know; we simply ask, is it your intention to make a full revelation on the witness stand, or will you preserve the same reticence that has characterized you ever since the fire?"

This was certainly coming directly to the point. Ray had no doubt now why he had been sent for, nor regarding Mr. Gregory's meaning. But he did not immediately answer. He was thinking—thinking more clearly than he had at any time since his lamentable discovery. He had not thought before of his being called as a witness, but he saw plainly now that such would be the case. He had been the first to report the fire, and his testimony on that point would be desired at the least. How could he under oath avoid telling the whole truth? If honest, would he not there have to declare what he really knew? He did not, however, care to commit himself either way just yet, so he replied:

"I have not admitted yet, Mr. Gregory, that I know any more about the fire than I have already made known. But suppose I do continue to maintain the same position I have so far occupied, what then?"

His answer seemed to give his questioner much satisfaction, for he nodded his head toward his companion in

a way that seemed to indicate "We are not mistaken in our man." Then he continued :

"I see, Mr. Branford, I must be even more explicit with you. But I expected it from what I have heard of you. In brief, then, and coming directly to my point, Mr. Hyde has every reason to believe that it was you who so pluckily grappled with him, as he jumped down from the mill fence on the night of the fire. He believes also that you know who his companions were, and that there is a special reason why you have in no way betrayed him, or them, since your discovery. Now, since you have had a reason of your own for keeping this knowledge to yourself so long, doubtless you will have a reason to still maintain your reticence. So we are asking you to do nothing that you have not already done, Mr. Branford ; probably nothing but that you still propose to do. We only say we are much interested in you ; we think so able a young fellow as you have shown yourself to be should have the education he so much desires ; and as a token of our good will merely, we propose to present you with a thousand dollars in cash, when you give us the assurance that you will not remember on the witness stand that you saw either of those four men on the night of the fire. My friend, Mr. Wilson, has the money with him now, and will hand it over to you as soon as you give us this promise, You understand me, I trust, Mr. Branford."

These words were very persuasively and smilingly uttered. And to make the temptation as great as possible, Mr. Wilson took out his pocketbook, and counting ten one hundred dollar bills, laid them on the table in easy reach of the lad. "Just your promise, Mr. Branford, that you will throughout the trial maintain the position you have steadily held since the fire, and you may put those bills into your pocket," he said, and as though he felt sure of the lad's acceptance he closed his pocketbook, and put it away.

How did the temptation affect Ray? It opened his eyes to the true position he had been occupying all those weeks, and enabled him to see himself as he had not done before. It was a rude awakening. The shock was one that filled him with alarm. Could it be possible that the standpoint he had taken respecting his duty in this matter of the fire was one that led the criminals themselves to believe he was in sympathy with them? Had they really thought he could be bought with a price? That he would sell his manhood, his Christian faith, betray his Master, for a paltry thousand dollars? The blood boiled within him at the insult, and yet he restrained himself. He even grew perfectly calm, and smiled upon them. He felt his contemptible position had merited just such a stinging rebuke. More than that, he had determined to outwit these scoundrels, and even before he left the city to clear his name and reputa-

tion from every shadow of reproach that his weeks of silence had brought upon it.

"Gentlemen," he said, with provoking coolness, "this is a remarkable offer of yours. It is one that should not be accepted hastily. How long are you willing to give me that I may think it over?"

His tempters tried in every way to bring him to an immediate decision, but were not successful. "Let me take a turn in the fresh air, and get a good dinner," Ray persistently said. "At two o'clock I will meet you here, and give you a decided answer." The men finally yielded a reluctant consent, and Ray hastened down to the street.

Glancing over at the clock tower, he saw it was five minutes to twelve. "Two hours," he said, with an air of relief. "A great deal can sometimes be done in two hours." Then he hurried off to find a telegraph office.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### RAY'S DECISION AND ITS RESULT.

WHILE in the Afton Graded School, Ray had become familiar with a code of communication among the scholars, wherein numerals were used for the consonants, and certain consonants for the vowels. He knew Edward Lawton was equally familiar with the code, and entering the telegraph office, he embodied the following message in the apparently meaningless symbols, and had it forwarded to him:

Please translate this message and hand to Mr. Bacon.

Have Blake, I. T. Smith, and my father arrested as accomplices of Hyde. There is no mistake about this. On my arrival, at eight o'clock to-night, I will make a full explanation. Make the arrests before two o'clock, or their confederates here will warn them to escape. Let me hear from you, if possible, before two. Direct to me at this office.

RAY BRANFORD.

It cost quite a sum to send the message, but Ray paid the amount cheerfully, and telling the operator he would call for a reply, he went on to the nearest restaurant and got his dinner. On his return to the office half an hour later, he found this message awaiting him, in the same code that he had employed:

Your message was received, and as Edward was not at home, I translated it, and carried it to Mr. Bacon. He directs me to say that the officers have already been sent to make the arrests, and he will report their success before two, if possible.

DAISY LAWTON.

"It is a strange code you are using," remarked the operator, inquisitively, as Ray slowly deciphered the message.

"Yes, sir," Ray quietly admitted; then he said: "There may be another message for me before two o'clock. I will call for it."

He now left the office, and walked briskly about the streets, admiring the massive buildings and the other evidences of thrift and enterprise for which the city was noted. Fifteen minutes before two he returned for his expected message.

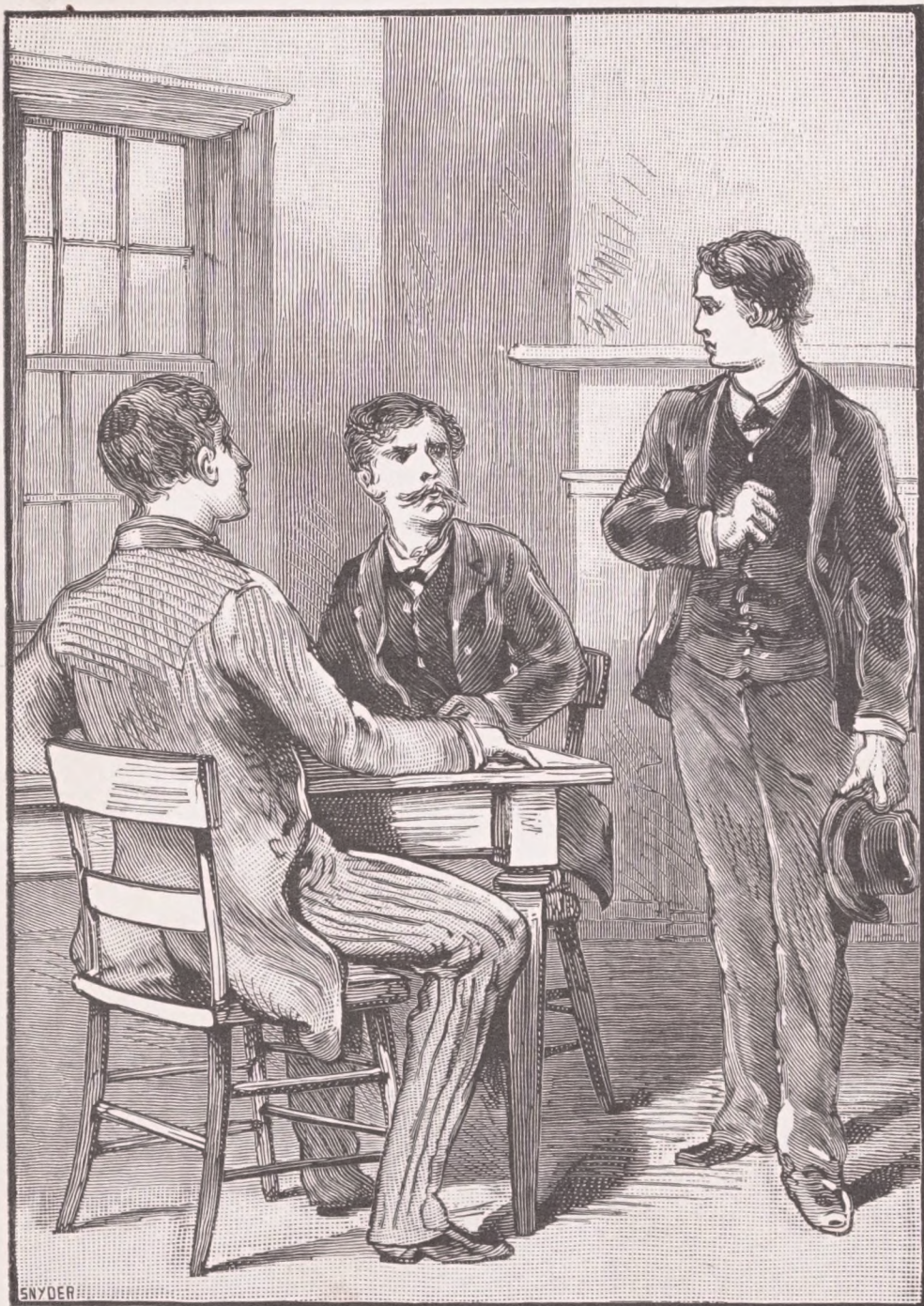
"There is none," the operator replied; "but it is not yet two, and we may receive it any moment."

Ray waited five minutes, and then turned to go, saying:

"I have an engagement at two, so will call later for the message."

"Hold on," the operator answered, "there's a message coming over the wires, and by the sound, I think it is in your peculiar code." And he gave his attention to his indicator. A moment later he brought the message to Ray, who hurried up the street with it in his hand, deciphering it as he went. It read:





Black Forge Mills.

Blake was found hanging around the telegraph office, and was immediately arrested. The officers have not yet returned from the Forge, but there is little doubt that the other two will be secured.

BACON.

Ray reached Powell Street, and with a feeling of triumph ran up the stairway in No. 27, to Room 3. He was a little late, and could detect a slight appearance of anxiety on the faces of the two men awaiting him, probably on account of his delay in coming.

"Well, sir, what is your decision?" was his sharp greeting from Mr. Gregory, while Mr. Wilson gazed intently into his face, as though he would read his inmost thought.

Ray did not keep them waiting long for his answer. Walking down the room to the chair he had occupied when in the room before, he laid one hand upon its back, and looked his tempters squarely in their faces. There was no show of fear in his eyes, and no tremor in his clear, ringing tones, as he replied:

"Gentlemen, I have cause to thank you for your unprecedented offer of this morning. I have reason to thank you, because it has shown me clearly and emphatically the position I was unconsciously occupying—the strange neglect of duty I had for weeks been guilty of. But let me assure you I have not quite reached the point that I am ready to sell my manhood for even one thousand dollars, great as that sum seems to me. As proof of this,

let me tell you that I went directly from this room to a telegraph office, and this return telegram in my hand states that Blake is already under arrest, and that the other criminals soon would be. I can only add, at the trial I shall tell 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' Good-day, gentlemen." And before either of the men could make a movement to stop him, had that been their desire, he had turned and left the room.

The next train for Afton did not leave the city until four o'clock, so Ray wandered on down the streets, with little thought as to just where he was going. A peace that had long been absent from his heart had returned; his conscience, which had so long been at variance with his action, had now come into perfect accord. He was happier than he had at any time been since the night of the fire. Humbled by his experience, yet so sweetly conscious was he of the Master's nearness and the Master's forgiveness, that he could not but repeat the words of one of God's children, written long before; words that thousands of humbled and penitent hearts have found so exactly suited, each to his own individual case: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, according to thy loving kindness; . . . Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

So busy was Ray with his own thoughts, that he did

not notice that he had wandered beyond the limits of the city proper, and was now in one of its growing suburbs. He was aroused from his pre-occupied condition by suddenly finding himself face to face with a number of large and magnificent buildings, surrounded by extensive lawns, upon which were long rows of tall and stately elms.

An old white-haired gentleman stood by the fence that shut off the lawn from the street, and Ray, stopping, asked him what buildings they were. The old man turned slowly around and looked curiously at the lad.

"They are the university buildings," he slowly replied; "and, my lad, sixty years ago, when I was scarcely older than you, I entered them as a student. There have been great changes since then. The college has prospered. New buildings have been erected and the campus has been beautified—but, ah! those were delightful days! I hope, my lad, you love to study, and may one day graduate from this honored institution of learning."

"I cannot tell you, sir," replied Ray, "how I hope for that very thing myself; but God alone knows whether I shall be able to do it."

"May he lead you on to a full realization of your hopes," responded the old gentleman, solemnly. "Here is my card, and if I can ever be of any service to you, let me know. May I ask your name in return?"

"Ray Branford," replied the lad, looking at the card

laid in his own hand. It was a plain card, with simply the name, Charles T. Swinburne, upon it. But Ray knew who he was, and looked almost reverently up into his face. The name of that old gentleman was known in every household of that State, in many a household throughout the land. As scholar, as philanthropist, as a worker in every true and holy cause, was he known; his voice had ever been raised, his purse had ever been open, on behalf of the lowly and oppressed. Even now, in his ripe old age, it was no light influence for good he was still wielding.

"I have heard my pastor, Mr. Carleton, of the First Church, Afton, speak of you," Ray ventured to say; "and I thank you for the kind and encouraging words you have spoken to me to-day."

"I know Ralph Carleton," answered the old man, heartily. "I knew his father before him. You may safely listen to his counsel, for he speaks as moved by the Spirit of God. When you return home, tell him you have met me, and that I say: 'God be with thee.'"

Bidding Mr. Swinburne good-bye, Ray now hurried off toward the city, knowing he barely had time to catch his train. But the slight circumstance of that meeting was, as he found in later years, one of God's links welded into the providential chain that was drawing him on to his life's work.

The train arrived at Afton soon after eight, and Ray,

as he stepped out on to the platform, found Mr. Bacon, Mr. Carleton, and Mr. Woodhull waiting for him. Mr. Woodhull had come up from the farm to meet an earlier train, on which he had expected Ray. As the lad did not come on that, however, he had delayed his return home until the arrival of the eight o'clock train. At the depot he had met Mr. Bacon and Mr. Carleton, and they told him of Ray's telegram, though none understood the cause of his delay, nor just what he would have to reveal.

Ray's first question, as he shook hands with his three friends, was: "Have the two other men been found?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Bacon; "all three are now in the lockup, and we have been anxiously awaiting your coming. Would you prefer to see me alone, or shall Mr. Carleton and Mr. Woodhull go with us?"

"I prefer to have all of you present as I tell my story," said Ray, gravely. "Let us go to some place where we may be undisturbed. It is a long and a strange experience I have to relate."

"We might go up to Dr. Gasque's office," suggested Mr. Carleton.

They soon reached the office, and Ray, sparing not himself at all, began with the night of the fire, and told of his discovery, of his false notion of duty, and of his strange interview with the two men in the city, and how he had outwitted them.

Mr. Carleton was the first to speak after he had fin-

ished. "Your mistake, Ray," he said, "was perhaps a natural one; it certainly was one many an older person might have made. But you can now see that, after all, it was a course of deception. You were living a lie; for you were saying by your silence that you did not know who the criminals were."

"Those men must fear your testimony greatly, Ray, to offer you such an inducement to preserve silence," remarked Mr. Woodhull. "You say their names were Wilson and Gregory? I thought Hyde's lawyer was named Sanford."

"Oh, these men were acting for Sanford," replied Mr. Bacon. "Wilson is probably some friend of Hyde's, and Gregory is some lawyer employed for this work. It isn't likely that either of the men gave his right name, and that room was one they had just hired for this interview. They intended to cover up their own tracks whether they succeeded or failed in their attempted bribery. Blake knew of that meeting, for all the forenoon and up to the time of his arrest he was around the depot, and he told the operator if any message came for him he should be within call. Those fellows intended to telegraph him if they could not buy Ray into silence. He got the better of them by telegraphing first. I have been thinking, Ray, whether your father would not be willing to turn state's evidence, and go on the stand as a witness against the others. What do you think?"

Ray gave him a grateful look, as he replied :

“ I don’t know, sir. I cannot help feeling that father was forced into this thing, or led into it while under the influence of liquor. When sober, he is usually ready to do the fair thing ; it certainly can do no harm to make him the offer. I want to see him, and tell him just how I came to do as I have done. So, if Mr. Woodhull is willing, I will come up to the village to-morrow, and we will go and see him.”

Mr. Woodhull readily assented, and then Ray and he drove off home. The next day the lad returned to the village, and, in company with Mr. Bacon, he visited the jail. They found Mr. Branford sober, but sullen ; and at first he paid little attention to Ray’s story. As the boy went on, however, to describe his encounter with Hyde, on the night of the fire, his father manifested some interest ; and before he had got through with the account of his own struggle to believe it was right to shield his father in his crime, and the story of his interview with the two men in the city which had so plainly revealed his duty to him, the old man broke down. Great tears streamed down his cheeks, and as soon as he could control himself, he said :

“ Did they think, Ray, they could bribe you with money to do their dirty work ? I could have told them better than that ; but I knew nothing of this undertaking. Don’t think I hold anything against you, lad, for causing

my arrest. I've been tempted to give myself up a half dozen times since the fire. Perhaps a few years in jail will make a man of me—for it will keep me sober. It's my only hope of salvation, anyway; and, Ray, you'll sometimes come to see me; and you'll never forget to pray for your old father."

"Never!" replied Ray, emphatically. "And perhaps, father, this is God's way of bringing you to himself. I have prayed for you, night and day, ever since I gave myself to him. I couldn't bear that you should be sent to prison; for I thought it would so harden you, that you would never come to Jesus. But God's ways are not as our ways; and it may be God's hand is leading you where you will think more of him, and learn to love him."

The old man bowed his head on his hands and wept like a child, and said:

"Don't think, Ray, that I haven't been pleased with the change you and George and the girls have made in your lives. I've been proud of you all, and down in my heart I've longed for the same thing. But I thought there was no hope for an old sinner like me."

"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them," repeated Ray, softly.

"Perhaps there is hope for me, after all," murmured the repentant man.

Mr. Bacon ventured now to suggest his plan to Mr. Branford, and assured him that the directors of the mill would willingly allow him to take the witness stand against his companions in crime.

“I shall tell the whole truth,” replied he, slowly, “but I ask no favors on that account. I am willing to take the punishment I deserve. I am more afraid of myself and my appetite for rum, than all other things beside. Please allow me to go to prison,” he begged, piteously; “for then there may be some hopes for me.”

Hyde was the only one of the four criminals who actually stood trial. He was convicted through the united testimony of Mr. Branford, Ray, and the detective who had caused his arrest. Blake, Smith, and Mr. Branford, all pleaded guilty. As in Hyde's trial it had been shown that he and Blake were the instigators and leaders in the work of burning the mills, each of them received a sentence of five years. Smith and Mr. Branford were given three and two years respectively. Mr. Branford, sober, neatly dressed, and cleanly shaved, received his sentence almost with joy on his face. “You might have made it longer, judge,” he said, with a bow. “Perhaps it will be the making of me. I feel that it will.”

George and Ray had stood by him to the last, and accompanied him to the prison gates. There they bade him good-bye, promising to write often, and to come occasionally to see him. “We shall, every evening, at nine

o'clock, wherever we are, pray for you," Ray said, in parting; "and here is my Bible, father, with many passages I have found precious marked in it. Promise me you will read it, and that you will try and pray for yourself."

"I will, Ray, and I thank you for the book. Nor shall I forget the time you are praying for me. Don't feel bad about my going into these walls. I tell you, God knows what's best for a man. I really feel there is some hopes of my reaching heaven. How tickled your ma will be to see me there!" And, brushing the tears from his eyes, he turned and walked firmly within the massive gates, which closed upon him for two long years.

Ray and George were at church together the next Sunday. Mr. Bacon came to them at the close of the service, and said:

"Can you both call at my house to-morrow evening? I have something I want to tell you."

So the next evening the brothers went up to Mr. Bacon's house. That gentleman received them in his library, and at once proceeded to business.

"You both know," he said, "how there was but little insurance on the mills, and that the company was ruined when they were burned. Mr. Lawton was the heaviest loser, and so great was his loss that Mrs. Lawton will be obliged to sell her mansion. She has a small cottage of her own, and hopes to save enough out of the estate to

support her and the two children until Edward is able to work for them. I did not have so much invested in the mills, and so have not lost as heavily. Last week I bought a small mill, employing about fifty hands, in the village of Wenton, about twenty miles down the railroad. I want a good, honest fellow to go down there as my superintendent and general overseer, though I shall be down there nearly every day. What do you think, George; would you be willing to go down there for me?"

"Do you think I would do?" asked George, in suppressed excitement. "I would try very hard to suit you."

"I don't doubt it, George. You are honest, and that is the main thing. All the rest, with my shewing, you can easily learn," replied Mr. Bacon, heartily. "I have a nice house down there for you, and will give you, for the present, two dollars a day. You may take your sisters down too, and we'll find work for them."

"How can I thank you, sir?" George answered, turning first red, and then pale, with his intense emotion.

"By doing your best," replied Mr. Bacon. Then he turned to Ray. "I was also going to tell you something this evening, Ray, that I supposed I had the right to," he said, "but Mr. Carleton has convinced me that it is his own exclusive privilege; so, really, I shall have to refer you to him." And he rather enjoyed Ray's puzzled looks.

As the brothers walked down the street on their way

home, for Ray was going back to the Forge that night, George said :

“Here for a few weeks I have been distrusting God again, and see just what he has done for me, Ray. I will doubt him no more. I was going to worry over getting down to Wenton, but I won’t even do that. God will provide a way.”

“He has already,” replied Ray, with a smile, “for I have enough money left of what I had saved to take you all down there, and start you off in your new home in good shape. I am so glad for you, George.”

“Have you given up the academy?” asked George, anxiously.

“No ; a thousand times no !” replied Ray. “But God will open the way when it is right for me to go. Perhaps, for my neglect of duty, he wishes me to wait awhile. I shall work on, abiding his own time. You can have the money as well as not.”

“I will accept it as a loan,” George replied. “I have so regarded all the money you have given me, Ray, and you shall have it, principal and interest, as soon as I can save it.”

“Perhaps it will be along by the time I am ready for the academy, then,” replied Ray, with a good-natured laugh. “Just as though every cent of the money didn’t belong to you.”

He was to go to the academy, however, and even

sooner than he thought. Already had God opened the way.

The next Friday evening Ray was in his accustomed place in the prayer room. His voice had the old, positive ring in it, as he arose and testified for Jesus. The subject for the evening had been based upon the words: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." Taking up the thought of this verse, Ray said:

"I can testify to-night that these words are true. The result of my recent trying experience is this—I never knew Jesus as I know him now. I never loved him as I love him now. I never realized what it was to hold near and intimate relationship with him as I realize now. Because I did not, in the hour of my great temptation, wholly deny his name, he has drawn closer to me, and our relations have become so sweet and tender, that I can hear him say, not only: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed thee,' but he adds, 'I have called thee by thy name.'"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CLINTON ACADEMY.

AT the close of the service, Mr. Carleton came around where Ray was talking with Edward Lawton and his sister Daisy, and remarked, as he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder:

"We were glad to hear your testimony to-night, Ray. We cannot help believing with you, that the Master is strangely but surely leading you along 'the way of holiness.' God grant it may be so. But come—you are to go home with me to-night."

"I would like to do so, ever so much," replied Ray, giving his pastor a look in which love and confidence and pleasure were all mingled; "but Mr. Woodhull will expect me home, and I have been absent from the farm so much lately. I think I shall have to decline your invitation this time."

"Mr. Woodhull will not expect you to-night," answered Mr. Carleton, with a mischievous look at Edward and Daisy, "for I told him some time ago I should keep you with me to-night. There is an important matter I wish to talk over with you. So get your horse and wagon, and Mrs. Carleton and I will ride up to the parsonage with you."

Whatever the important matter was, Edward and Daisy evidently were not ignorant of it, for they both laughed, and seemed, for some reason, to be greatly pleased.

"Yes, Ray," Edward added, looking over to Mr. Carleton, who had turned to speak with Mrs. Lawton, "and before you leave for Long Point farm in the morning, remember that you are to come around and talk that same important matter over with me."

Mr. Carleton shook his finger at Edward, who immediately relapsed into silence. Daisy, however, her eyes fairly sparkling with some unknown joy, added: "We shall certainly expect you, Ray." And then she turned and walked off home with her mother and Edward.

Ray, completely mystified by these allusions, and suddenly recalling Mr. Bacon's words on the Monday evening before, went off to the shed for his horse and wagon, wondering what "important thing" was in store for him, which seemed to give all the others so much joy.

But he did not long remain in ignorance of it, for as soon as the horse had been cared for, and he and Mr. and Mrs. Carleton were comfortably seated about the fire in the cosy sitting room at the parsonage, Mr. Carleton asked:

"You have heard of the Clinton Academy, at Easton, Ray?"

Hadn't he? Wasn't that the very school he had

desired to attend, but had never expected to have the desire realized, even when saving up his money, for the expense had seemed to be entirely beyond his reach? Was it not there that both Mr. Greenough and Mr. Carleton had prepared for college? Hadn't Mr. Phillips, the principal of the school, and a college classmate of Mr. Carleton, visited Afton only the summer before, and hadn't he seen him and talked with him? He had a catalogue of that very academy, moreover, that the principal had sent him the September before, and what a struggle it had been for him to give up the idea of entering it then, no one but God and himself would ever know. With glistening eyes, and with a great hope coming into his heart that the "important matter" spoken of might have something to do with his attending that school, Ray therefore replied:

"Yes, sir; you know I met Mr. Phillips, the principal, when he visited you, and on his return home, he sent me a catalogue of the institution."

Mr. Carleton assented, in a way that seemed to imply, "Oh, yes, I knew all about it before;" then he continued:

"Well, do you remember Mr. Swinburne, the old, white-haired gentleman whom you met and talked with at the university grounds, when you were in the city?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ray, almost breathlessly now.

"I got a letter from him," Mr. Carleton explained, "only a few days after you met him, making inquiries

about you. I thought it best not only to tell him your history, but also to give him an account of your manly resistance to a great temptation there that day. I soon received a letter in answer to mine. In it he stated that a number of years ago he established several scholarships at Clinton Academy, and had reserved the right so long as he should live to name the young men who should receive the income from them. This income is sufficient to pay the tuition and the room rent at the academy, and leaves only the board and incidentals to be met by the student himself. He closed his letter by saying one of the scholarships became vacant at the close of the last academic year, and has not as yet been assigned to any one, and he should be glad to name you for it. I took the liberty to request him to do so. Your entire expenses outside of what this scholarship provides for cannot amount to over one hundred and fifty dollars for the year. There will be many ways for you to help yourself during the school term, as well as in the vacations. Friends here in Afton stand ready to help where your own exertions fail to supply the necessary funds; so really I think you may begin your academic course there immediately after Thanksgiving."

"But you know I have lost one term; could I enter now and go on with the class?" asked Ray, anxiously.

"We thought of all that," replied Mr. Carleton, "and that is why we have not spoken to you about this before.

We waited until Mr. Greenough wrote to Mr. Phillips as to the outlook for you to enter the winter term. He gave Mr. Phillips a list of the studies you had completed, and he replied that you could very readily enter and go on with the present freshman class, some of your studies being even in advance of the first term there at the academy, while none are behind it. There is then no objection on that score. The main question is, are you ready to undertake it?"

"Just one thing more, Mr. Carleton," Ray said, with evident embarrassment; "there is nothing unmanly in my accepting this aid?"

"I had expected that question, foolish as it is," replied Mr. Carleton, with a laugh. "If it is unmanly, then I was unmanly, for I went through Clinton Academy on one of those very scholarships. But, seriously, where is it unmanly? You can go through the academy working your own way without doubt. But you will have to stay out some in order to earn the necessary funds. This interrupts your studies, and compels you, we will say, to be six years in getting what otherwise you would have gotten in four. Which is wiser, to lose those two years, or accept the slight aid that will bring you along two years sooner to your life's work? The town or State, one or both, must maintain our common schools; our colleges and academies exist only because some friends have liberally endowed them. There is no part of the education that

comes to us that has not been secured at less cost because of the help others have afforded. It is simply a question of the amount of help we will permit ourselves to receive. Thousands of our most useful men would never have received an education at all had it not been for accepting just the same kind of help that is now offered you."

"I guess the question was a foolish one," admitted Ray; "but I shall feel all the better for your explanation, and I am very grateful to all of you who have taken interest enough in me to arrange this thing. I had scarcely thought it possible for me to go to Clinton Academy, even while I was saving up my money to go to some school. It was a hard struggle, too, for me to give up that money to George; but I knew it was right, and I did it, believing that God would open the way for me to get an education, and he has, even better than I planned." He was silent a moment or two, as though in deep thought, then he added: "Who would have supposed that just that meeting with Mr. Swinburne that day would have led to this."

"Remember, too," said Mr. Carleton, with emphasis, "that it was after you refused to accept the money those men offered you for your education, and not before. When you had refused to accept an education by dishonest means, God led you in his way, and opened for you this door. So far as I can see, the education is within your reach, and in an honest, manly way also."

“God’s ways are better as well as higher than our ways,” remarked Ray, his eyes filling with tears of joy. “This, then, was what Edward Lawton wanted to talk over with me. How I wish he was going too!”

“He is,” answered Mr. Carleton, with a laugh; “that is what he wants to talk over with you. His mother finds that she can, with economy, send him, though he will have to help himself somewhat, and as Mrs. Lawton will have much furniture to spare when she moves into her cottage, she proposes to fit you boys out with everything to make your rooms at the academy comfortable. There will not be a thing for you to provide in that direction.”

“Well, I don’t know that I shall sleep any to-night under the inspiration of this good news,” said Ray, as he arose to be shown to his room; and, indeed, his bright, sparkling eyes scarcely looked as though they would need sleep for hours to come. “I believe I would start for Long Point farm, late as it is, just to throw off this exuberance of spirit, were it not that Edward wants to see me in the morning.”

“Which would be ignoring our hospitality entirely,” remarked Mrs. Carleton, with a laugh, as she bade him good-night.

The next morning Ray went around to Edward Lawton’s, and so busy did they at once become with their plans and with their selection of the articles they would have sent to the academy for their use, that the clock

struck twelve, and Miss Daisy, bright and pretty in her morning dress, entered the room to announce dinner before they were through.

“Why,” Ray exclaimed, in consternation, “I ought to have been at Long Point farm long before this. Really, you must excuse me.” And his looks showed how he hated to go.

“You needn’t worry, Mr. Ray,” said Daisy, with a graceful courtesy. “Mr. Woodhull knew of this also, and he said if we would only let you get home by night, he would have reason to thank us.”

Ray needed no farther urging to remain. He found Mrs. Lawton kind and motherly, and as she spoke of his and Edward’s going to the academy, Ray could not help thinking she could not be more interested if they were both her own boys. And a little later, when he took his leave, she seemed almost to echo his own thought, for she said :

“I want you to feel, Ray, that you are always welcome here ; indeed, count this as one of your homes. For I can never forget that but for you I should not only now be bereft of husband, but of son also.”

Ray found Mr. Jacob Woodhull at the farm when he arrived there, and he soon ascertained that both he and his nephew were already well acquainted with the new plans formed for him.

“We hate to lose you,” Mr. George Woodhull said ;

“but we are anxious for your advancement, and shall on that account even hasten your going. Only remember, your vacations are to be spent right here. I’ll pay you more for the sight of your face than any one else will for a whole week’s work.” And he turned away to hide his own deep feeling.

Later, Mr. Jacob Woodhull came around to the barn, where Ray was alone. He helped the boy finish the few chores that remained to be done, and then leaning back against the stanchion of one of the stalls, he asked :

“Do you remember, Ray, the night when you came over to my place and offered to pay me for the damage you had done me?”

“Yes,” replied Ray ; “and I hope you think better of me to-night than you did then.”

“I certainly do,” the old man replied, emphatically ; “but do you remember what I charged you then?”

“Why, twenty-five dollars,” answered Ray.

“Exactly,” assented Mr. Woodhull ; “but, Ray, did it ever occur to you that I charged you about five times more than I ought to have done?”

“No, indeed !” said Ray. “I was the prime mover in all those scrapes, and I ought to have been made to pay dearly for them.”

“Only your share,” said the old man, sharply, “and I never regarded but five dollars of that money as mine. The other twenty I invested for you, and it is just won-

derful how the Lord has multiplied it. I have only been keeping it until I thought you would really need it, and when my nephew told me how you had given all your money to help George, and that you were going to the academy, I said, 'There, Jacob Woodhull, that boy'll need that money now, if he ever does—at least, he'll need a part of it;' so I've brought it down to you. This is only the first installment, but perhaps it is all you'll need just now; the rest is well invested, and when you want it, let me know. Here," and he took out a roll of bills from his pocket, and extended it toward Ray.

"Not a cent of it belongs to me," said Ray. "You ought to have it all."

"It isn't mine, either, and I'll never touch a cent of it again. I told the Lord you should have it when I invested it, and I'll leave it here, and you can do what you are a mind to with it." And the kind but eccentric old man threw the money on the floor, and walked out of the barn.

Ray picked up the roll and counted the bills; there were five, and all tens, making fifty dollars. He held them in his hand a few moments, and then slowly put them into his pocket. He now had ample provision for one term at the academy, and the best of it was—the Lord had provided it all. Surely he had no cause to fear but that the divine presence and guidance and blessing would go with him in this new undertaking.

On the Monday morning after Thanksgiving, though it was a day before the winter term at Clinton Academy opened, Edward and Ray left Afton for Easton, a small city in an adjoining State, and about fifty miles back from the sea coast. The academy buildings, numerous and spacious enough to accommodate over two hundred pupils, stood on a high hill just outside of this city, and commanded a fine view of the surrounding country. So famous was the school, however, that its ample accommodations were employed to their fullest capacity by the students who came crowding to its doors. Ray and Edward, consequently, as late comers, were obliged to put up with a room on the fourth floor of one of the older dormitories. But when they had unpacked and arranged their furniture, which had already arrived, the room presented a home-like appearance, not at all unattractive even to them. Well tired with their exertions, they sat down in their room after supper for a much-needed rest.

"I tell you what it is, Ned," said Ray, "we now begin a new career, and it is just the time for us to adopt rules that shall govern us throughout our whole academic course. What do you think?"

"I want to begin right, and keep right clear through to the end," answered Edward, thoughtfully. "Have you anything to suggest?"

"When I left the Forge for Long Point farm," answered Ray, "I adopted some resolutions that have been

a great help to me. I see no reason why I should not re-adopt them now. I will read them to you, and perhaps you can make some suggestion that will add to their effectiveness." And he took from his pocket the rules he had written long months before, and which we have already recorded.

Edward listened attentively, and, when Ray had finished, he remarked, gravely :

"I guess, Ray, if we live up to these rules here at the academy, we shall have all we want to do without adding others. But I'm willing to adopt them, too. I tell you, I have a small frame in my trunk, and I'll copy those off in my finest style; then we will frame them and hang them just over our study table. There they'll be where we can see them, and where others can see them, too. So we will keep them constantly in mind, and show our colors at one and the same time. What say you?"

"A capital suggestion!" answered Ray, enthusiastically.

Edward, who was an unusually fine penman, now got out his writing materials, and copied the resolutions, while Ray looked up the frame and made that ready. In less than an hour the task was completed, and the neatly written rules hung just above the study table.

"One thing more, Ned," said Ray, as he stepped down from the chair on which he had stood to hang the frame.

"What is it, chum?"

“Let us now ask the Master to help us keep them.”

“All right!”

And the two lads knelt there, and in turn asked their Saviour to help them to make those resolutions a part of their daily lives, in their studies, among their associates, and in whatsoever they should find to do.

With this consecration of their young lives to Jesus, they began their careers as students at Clinton Academy. Is it strange that the Master drew near and looked down in gentle love upon them? What else could we expect of One whose promise to his own is: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”?

## CHAPTER XIX.

### SHOWING THEIR COLORS.

IT is impossible to follow Ray and Edward in all the details of their academic life. All that can here be done is to give a few incidents that will illustrate their mental and spiritual growth; and if in these Ray seems to have undue prominence, let it be remembered it is his story that is given on these pages.

Ray sought an early opportunity to confer with Mr. Phillips, the principal of the academy.

"I presume you know my circumstances," he said. "If I succeed in graduating from the academy, I must have work. Do you know of anything I can get to do?"

Mr. Phillips smiled at the lad's straightforward way in coming to the point, and asked:

"What are you willing to do?"

"Anything that is honest," answered Ray, promptly.

"We have usually given the bell ringing and the sweeping of the recitation rooms in Prince Hall to some student, allowing him tuition and room rent free for the work. It happens that the student who has had the position for nearly four years wishes to give it up. As your tuition and room rent are already provided for by your

scholarship, I presume the trustees would be willing to let that work offset your board bill. It is an exacting position, however, for the first bell rings at six in the morning, the last at nine in the evening. Are you willing to undertake it?"

"Yes, sir. When shall I begin?" inquired Ray.

Mr. Phillips smiled again. The promptness of this lad was amusing. "To-morrow morning," he then answered. "Greene, in number 42, on the second floor of your own dormitory, will give you all needful instructions."

Ray now rose to go; but Mr. Phillips detained him a moment to add: "Some of the boys also find work to do on Saturdays down in the city. In the spring, work can be found to some extent among the neighboring farmers. You are at liberty to undertake anything that does not interfere with your school duties. I wish you success, and will help you all I can."

The office of bell ringer obliged Ray to rise very early. The office of sweeper compelled him to be on the alert at an early hour also. But this was no especial trial to Ray. He had all his life been accustomed to early rising. Promptness, if not one of his inborn qualities, was one he had acquired at a very early age. His mill life had drilled him to it. His farm life had simply supplemented it. It was all the same to him whether he arose at four or five o'clock in the morning, or whether he rang the bell once or twenty times a day. He adapted himself to

circumstances with perfect ease. Instead of bending to circumstances, circumstances bent to him. He made a good bell ringer and sweeper simply because he tried to perform even those tasks as he tried to do everything else—in the best possible way.

His position brought him into disfavor with some of his associates. In a large school like that there were some students who came from wealthy and aristocratic families, and they seemed to think that manual toil was a disgrace. Instead of honoring Ray for securing an education in this manly, independent way, they appeared to regard his coming among them as an insult to themselves. But I am glad to say there were but a few of this class; and even they, before a great while, were forced to respect Ray. They found he was as good a scholar as he was bell ringer and sweeper. They found he could row a boat, or bat a ball, as well as he could recite. They found him manly and gentlemanly at all times. It suddenly dawned upon their minds that any necessary and useful employment is respectable. It was Ray who taught them that truth. He dignified the most menial work he was called to perform. He did it by putting Christian principle into his work.

It was soon apparent to all, moreover, that Ray and Edward Lawton were inseparable. Some unusual tie evidently bound them together. Nor was it long before the reason for this was discovered. Ray had saved Edward's life at the risk of his own. Here was heroism,

and they could honor heroism wherever it was found. Ray at once became an important personage in their eyes. And this, together with his manly, courteous attitude toward all, soon made him a general favorite.

But Ray was not contented with the work he had already found to do. There were incidental expenses that must be met, and clothing that must be provided. His little store of money would soon be exhausted. He must contrive some way to carry himself through to the long summer vacation, and pay all bills. "I must keep myself just as far as possible from trespassing upon the generosity of my friends," he said. On Saturdays, therefore, he went among the farmers of the neighborhood, seeking work. He cut wood, and hauled it to the market. He helped to harvest the ice crop. He even shoveled paths when they were made necessary by a heavy fall of snow. One day he came up from the city, where he had been on an errand, rubbing his hands in great glee. "Ned," he cried, bursting into the room where his chum was sitting, "I have found two grand jobs for us."

"That's good news," answered Edward, who had manfully done all he could find to do, that he might lighten his mother's burdens. "What are they?"

"One is in a shoe store," replied Ray. "They want an extra clerk on Saturday and Saturday evenings; will pay a dollar and a half each time. I've booked you for the place. How's that?"

"Let me hear about the other first," said his chum, with a smile.

"The other is in a grocery store; but it is heavier work, and there is more exposure. So I kept that for myself," remarked Ray.

"And what is the pay?" asked Ned; for he knew Ray well enough to suspect there was an additional reason for his choice.

"Why, they will give but a dollar each time," Ray admitted, after some hesitation; "but that is all right."

"No, it isn't," answered Edward, decidedly. "I have allowed you to take the heaviest part in many of our jobs, because I knew you were more capable and more used to toil; but I won't take more pay. I'll go to that shoe store if you will take the extra half dollar; or else I'll throw up the job."

Ray tried to argue the unreasonableness of this; but Edward would not yield. And the matter was finally settled by putting all the money they both earned into a common fund, from which each was to draw as he had need. This custom continued between these two friends not only through their academic, but also through their college course.

There were over five thousand volumes in the library belonging to the school. From this treasury of knowledge Ray drew largely. It was the first time in his life he had been favored with such a privilege, and every

moment of his spare time was occupied with books therefrom. History, poetry, the best works of fiction, were alike devoured by him. His tenacious memory held much that he read. He began here, too, a habit of systematic reading, which he maintained all through his student life, and found of immense value.

“What are you doing with those books, Ray ; copying them ?” asked Edward, one day.

“No, though I am making their contents mine as much as possible,” Ray replied. “As I read, I try to note down the main thought, and the line of argument of the writer. When I have finished the book, I review and re-write the notes I have made on the chapters, bringing them into a consecutive whole. Thus, when I am through, I have the substance of that book fixed in mind ; know the important topics on which it treats ; and can file away the notes for reference, if I so desire, hereafter. I mean to follow this custom with every book I read, and make myself familiar with its contents.”

“No one can doubt the wisdom of the plan ; but how about the patience necessary to carry it out ?” added his chum.

“I think in the long run I shall get over more ground than I should with the usual method of reading, and with this advantage, I shall know and can utilize what I have read. Then, hereafter, when I speak or write upon a

given subject, I shall be able to turn at once to the best source for the necessary material," answered Ray.

"Your powder and shot will be right at hand; all you will have to do will be to load and fire," suggested Ned. "Well, that is a good idea, and if there is no patent on your arrangement, I will adopt it too."

"It is public property; has been used long before my time, and will be used long after. I got the idea myself from a book I was reading not long ago. I do not see how there can be more than one opinion as to the usefulness of the plan," replied Ray, resuming his work.

This circumstance shows how systematically Ray entered into all his studies. His teachers soon began to look upon him as a pupil of no ordinary ability. He showed plainly that he meant to fully understand every topic under discussion. His motto to do everything thoroughly was again and again illustrated. Long before his first year was completed he was regarded as the most promising scholar in the school.

An incident occurred in the spring term, moreover, that well illustrated Ray's love of fair play, and his quiet, unassuming way of helping others. He came out on the playground one day to find a number of the students putting one of the town boys who had ventured on the field under the pump. The day was raw and chilly, and the lad was already well drenched, when Ray discovered him. With a quick bound he was at the boy's

side, and throwing his tormentors to the right and left with his strong arms, he caught the child—for he was scarcely more than that—in his arms, and carried him to his home.

Calling the next day to inquire after the boy, he found him dangerously sick from the drenching he had received. The mother, a widow with several smaller children, was almost beside herself with anxiety and despair. The boy, young as he was, had been her main stay, and by doing chores for a neighbor had earned a small pittance, upon which at this season the family was almost wholly dependent. Ray at once found time amid his own excessive duties to perform the boy's work, and each week handed over to the widow the small pay allowed, until the lad had fully recovered. The generous, noble act would probably have gone unnoticed had not the widow herself told of it. In some way it reached the ears of the principal of the academy, and one morning at the close of the chapel services he detained the students and told the whole story. He contrasted Ray's manly act with the cowardly and senseless one of the lad's persecutors, and ended by ordering the guilty students to defray all the expenses of the lad's sickness or they would be immediately expelled.

But perhaps Ray's consistent Christian life was the most noticeable thing about him. It was soon known that he and Edward were Christians. The rules they

had framed and placed so conspicuously above their study table were freely discussed by their associates. Some, of course, scoffed at the lads, but others honored them for at once showing their colors ; while those among the students who were Christians found they had earnest helpers in the new-comers.

They at once took an active part in the weekly prayer meeting held by the students. Ray threw himself with his whole-souled vigor into these services. His exhortations and appeals were examples of earnestness and eloquence, to which students and teachers listened in rapt attention. No student of so much power in religious meetings had ever before been connected with the school. The prayer meeting took on new life. Many dropped in who had not been accustomed to attend. A Young Men's Christian Association was formed. Personal work was inaugurated ; special prayer was offered ; and the Spirit came in quickening and convicting power. A goodly number of the students decided for Jesus ; the religious tone of the academy was elevated ; and better and more conscientious work was done in the class rooms, and in the study hours.

"Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it," became the watchword of many of those young men not only for their student days, but for life. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Two or three followers of Jesus with their own souls on fire will kindle into flame the

smouldering embers in the hearts of their lukewarm brethren. This was the work Ray and Edward did. Their bold stand and their manifest consecration to Jesus bore their legitimate fruit.

The esteem in which both lads were held may be readily seen from a letter sent by Mr. Phillips to Mr. Carleton at the close of the academic year.

EASTON, June 15, 18—

DEAR BROTHER CARLETON :

In answer to your letter of recent date, asking after the mental and spiritual welfare of *your* two boys, Ray and Edward, I most heartily pen the following :

From the day they first came to us they have commanded not only our approval, but our respect and love. As scholars, they have held exceedingly high rank. Ray easily leads his class, with Edward, to use a popular phrase, a good second ; and this, too, when both have done much manual labor to help themselves along.

Of their Christian character I can speak in equally high terms. From the day of their coming they have quietly but persistently shown their colors. Much of the deep religious interest obtaining among us during the winter and spring months has been due to their faithful labors for the Master.

With no intentional disparagement of Edward's abilities, permit me to say of Ray : His Christian purpose is one of the remarkable things about him. His talents, work, everything, appears to be subject to this Christian aim. He most strikingly illustrates in his daily life Paul's words : " God, whose I am and whom I serve." I feel that he, if spared, will make a power in the world.

In conclusion I can only add : If there are more boys in the Afton Graded School like the two you have sent us, we shall be more than glad to welcome them at Clinton Academy at any time.

Most cordially yours,

S. D. PHILLIPS.

Mr. Carleton handed this letter to Mr. Greenough the next time he met him. That worthy gentleman adjusted his glasses and read it through.

“Well, pastor,” he remarked as he finished, “I’m glad to hear this of those boys. I expected it. You see, too, Phillips’ opinion about Ray coincides with mine. His is a remarkable case. As I had occasion to remark once before, I never in all my life saw so marvelous an illustration of the Scripture, ‘Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.’ I am no prophet, but I believe the Lord has some signal work for that lad to do in our own or in foreign lands.”

And he was right.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

IT was a soft balmy day in June, just two years later than the close of our previous chapter. The little village of Wenton lay nestling white and beautiful among its surrounding hills. The words white and beautiful are meant literally. For the mill and cottages and stores and schoolhouse and chapel were all as white as fresh paint could make them, and the village was beautiful because every cottage had its garden, and green plot, and shrubs and flowers; while the mill was surrounded with tasteful lawns and tall shade trees and climbing vines.

George Branford firmly believed that there was a moral and an elevating influence in the beauties God has thrown around us. He said it costs the manufacturer but little more to make his cottages and factories pretty and tasteful in their surroundings, and that he is more than compensated for the extra outlay in the ennobling effects upon his employés. They are broadened in mind, made contented in heart, and elevated in spirit. So, with Mr. Bacon's permission, he had during the two years and more that he had been here at Wenton car-

ried out his ideas to a practical result, and he was satisfied ; for there never was a happier nor more contented manufacturing community.

The little village had grown somewhat also during this time. First of all, the mill itself had been so enlarged as to be hardly recognizable. Indeed, the additions were so extensive that the old mill was only a wing of the main building now. Then this enlargement of the mill necessitated more tenement houses ; so a new street was opened back to the hills, and that row of pretty white cottages was built. Nor was this all. There was one other new building. Just down the street there, and almost in the centre of the clustered houses was a chapel, its white spire rising sixty feet toward the heavens. That has a history all its own.

When George Branford first moved to Wenton no religious services were held in the village. He stood this condition of things just one week, and then he organized a Sunday-school and established a weekly prayer meeting. These services were held in the schoolhouse, for the want of a more suitable place. But one day Sailor Jack came down to Wenton to visit his old friend. After going over the mill, he took a stroll around the village. He even climbed the highest hill and looked down upon the busy community at its base. Then he returned to the mill office, and said, abruptly, to George Branford :

“ You need a chapel here badly.”

"I know it," George replied. "We shall have it in time."

"There is a nice lot out there on that knoll for it," added Sailor Jack. "It's almost the centre of the village, and it would be a sightly position."

"Yes," answered George, with more interest; "that's the site I had picked out for it."

"Wonder what it is worth?" went on Jack, rising from the chair into which he had thrown himself on entering the office, and going to the door to get a better view of the knoll.

"Oh, it can be bought at a reasonable price," said George. "Chapman, the storekeeper, just beyond, owns it; but he is a Christian man, and is anxious for the chapel, and will do the right thing when the time comes for building."

"Guess I'll go over and talk with him," Jack responded, sauntering off in the direction of the store.

George turned to his desk with a smile. He understood the drift of Jack's questions, and lifted up a silent prayer that the Lord would lead his old friend to carry out the purpose that was slowly forming in his mind.

He saw nothing more of Sailor Jack until dinner time. He seemed pre-occupied at the table, and ate in almost absolute silence. When he had finished his meal, however, he pushed his chair back from the table, and crossing one

knee over the other, he looked steadily at George for a half minute.

“Did I ever tell you, George,” he then asked, “that my mother was born in this town?”

“No,” replied George, in some surprise.

“It is a fact,” answered he; “she was born about a mile out of this village, and lived there until she was quite a girl. Her maiden name was Wenton, and it’s from some of her folks most likely that the village takes its name.”

“There used to be an old grist mill on the stream near where the factory now stands, owned and run by a man named Isaac Wenton; that gave rise to the name of Wenton’s Mill, and when a post office and railroad station were established here, it was shortened to Wenton,” explained George.

“He was my mother’s uncle,” said Jack; “but what I’m coming at is this: I have bought that knoll of Chapman, and I’m going to erect a neat, comfortable chapel on the lot at my own expense, and call it Wenton Memorial Chapel, in memory of my mother. Whenever you organize a church here, I’ll present the property to it, and add funds enough to keep the building in constant repair.”

And he was as good as his word. As soon as the plans could be perfected, the building was begun, and before another winter came the Wenton Memorial Church was

organized with twenty-four members, and took possession of the valuable chapel property.

But let us now look at some of the persons at Wenton in whom we have already become interested, for there have been changes in them also during the past two years. The mill whistle blew sharply for noon, and a stout, well-dressed gentleman stepped out from the mill office, and nodded pleasantly to the employés, who were passing him on their way to their homes. He was soon joined by a young lady, from the office also, and the two walked up the street toward a neat cottage near its end. The gentleman was Mr. George Branford, superintendent of the Wenton Manufacturing Company; for a corporation of which Mr. Bacon was president now controlled and ran the mill, and this accounted for the many improvements in the mill property and village that we have already noticed. George has developed into a first-class business man, and when the corporation was organized a year before, he was unanimously chosen superintendent at a handsome salary. The young lady by his side was his youngest sister, who had taken a course of study at a commercial college, and was now bookkeeper in the mill office. The two other sisters have married Christian men, and live in adjoining cottages over in the new row next to the hillside. That matronly woman standing on the porch of yonder cottage is our old friend Betsy Branford, though you would scarcely recognize her as the pale,

thin woman we last saw at the Forge. Good care, nourishing food, and abundant help in the household duties have wrought this change. You can see, too, by her thoughtful, intelligent face that she has kept pace with her husband in his mental growth, and that her religious faith is still strong and fervent. A glance within the cottage, moreover, at its tastefully-arranged apartments, its well-filled bookcases, and its air of comfort, tells of a refinement and culture you would scarcely have expected to see. It is wonderful how the grace of God can in so little time transform a whole household ; but it has been done here. Greeting her husband and sister with kisses, Betsy says :

“ Dinner is all on the table. I will call father, and we will sit down at once.”

In answer to her call, an old white-haired man came briskly in from the garden, and his neat dress, his pleasant features, and his quiet, gentlemanly appearance indicate a great change in Mr. Branford, the elder. That prison life, under God's blessing, reformed the man. His heart was touched as he entered those prison gates. Ray and George and the girls had all, at times, visited him. They wrote to him frequently, and even tried to point him to the “ Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.” Nor were those visits and letters without their influence upon him. But it was that Bible that Ray gave him, and the Spirit's influence on the truth,

as the penitent man pored over its pages, that finally gave him peace. God's time came, and the answer to the prayers that had so earnestly been lifted up for him was granted. He found Jesus precious unto his soul. He is very doubtful of himself. He has made no great professions ; but all who knew him in his old life can see the change. Through good behavior his term of service was materially shortened, and for some months now he has made his home with George, going faithfully to every religious service, working at whatsoever he can find to do, asking no favors of any one, yet thankful if he can be of use anywhere.

The family now sit down at the table, and the four children, young as they are, all bow their heads as George asks the blessing, and throughout the meal one would be impressed by the perfect order that reigned. There is evidently good training in that home.

"Oh, George, have you heard anything from Ray yet?" Betsy suddenly asked.

"Yes, and I must have left the letter at the office," he replied, feeling in every pocket for the missing letter. "I can tell you its contents, however. His school is over, and he is in Afton now. The letter came from there. He will be down on the five o'clock train to-night, and Edward and Daisy Lawton will come with him. All will remain over the picnic to-morrow. Ray agrees to make the speech, as he calls it, to the Sunday-

school, and all three will help us with the singing; so we are all provided for in that direction. It now promises to be a fine day; I shall stop the mill, and I see no reason why we may not have a grand time."

"Are we going to White Rock Lake, papa?" asked Bessie, a child of five or six years.

"Yes, dear," responded her father.

"Wid horses?" cried Master two-year-old Bob.

"Yes, with horses and wagons," replied George, tossing the boy high in the air, and catching him as he came down; "and when we get there, we shall have boating and swinging and a feast, and Uncle Ray will make a speech to the children, and the children will sing, and we shall have a big time generally, for young folks as well as old ones. Do you want to go, sir?"

"Me drive the horses," cried Bob, struggling to get down on the floor; and, succeeding, he pranced around in imitation of the steeds he had such a passion for.

"You'll go over to the train, of course, George?" asked his wife.

"Yes, and you had better come down to the office, and go over with me also. Nettie is going. We'll give them a family welcome," responded George.

The five o'clock train came rushing up to the little station, and scarcely was at a standstill, when the two young men and Daisy stepped down on the platform, and hurried toward the waiting Branfords.

Of the three, Ray, perhaps, had changed the least. His tall form had rounded out somewhat, and he had a maturer look, but otherwise there was scarcely a perceptible difference. The same honest eyes and noble countenance, the same resolute purpose, and the same trustful spirit were all there. He and Edward have actually completed three years at Clinton Academy, and are now nearly twenty. They have lost nothing in rank as scholars, or in their influence as Christians; and they have been able to meet their expenses largely through their own exertions.

Ray was no longer the bell-ringer and sweeper at the academy, however. Not that he was ever ashamed of those offices, but because he no longer needed to keep them. George persisted in paying back the money that he had received from Ray in the time of his greatest need, and Mr. Jacob Woodhull as stubbornly declared he had money that belonged to the lad, and from these two, with what he had himself earned during the summer vacation, Ray had enough to meet the expenses of the second year without special effort. Since then he had had a position as tutor to a deformed boy in Easton, and the compensation he received was ample enough to defray his school expenses. This was an arrangement for the year to come also, and Ray had no anxiety on the score of his finances.

Edward was more delicate than Ray, and his studies

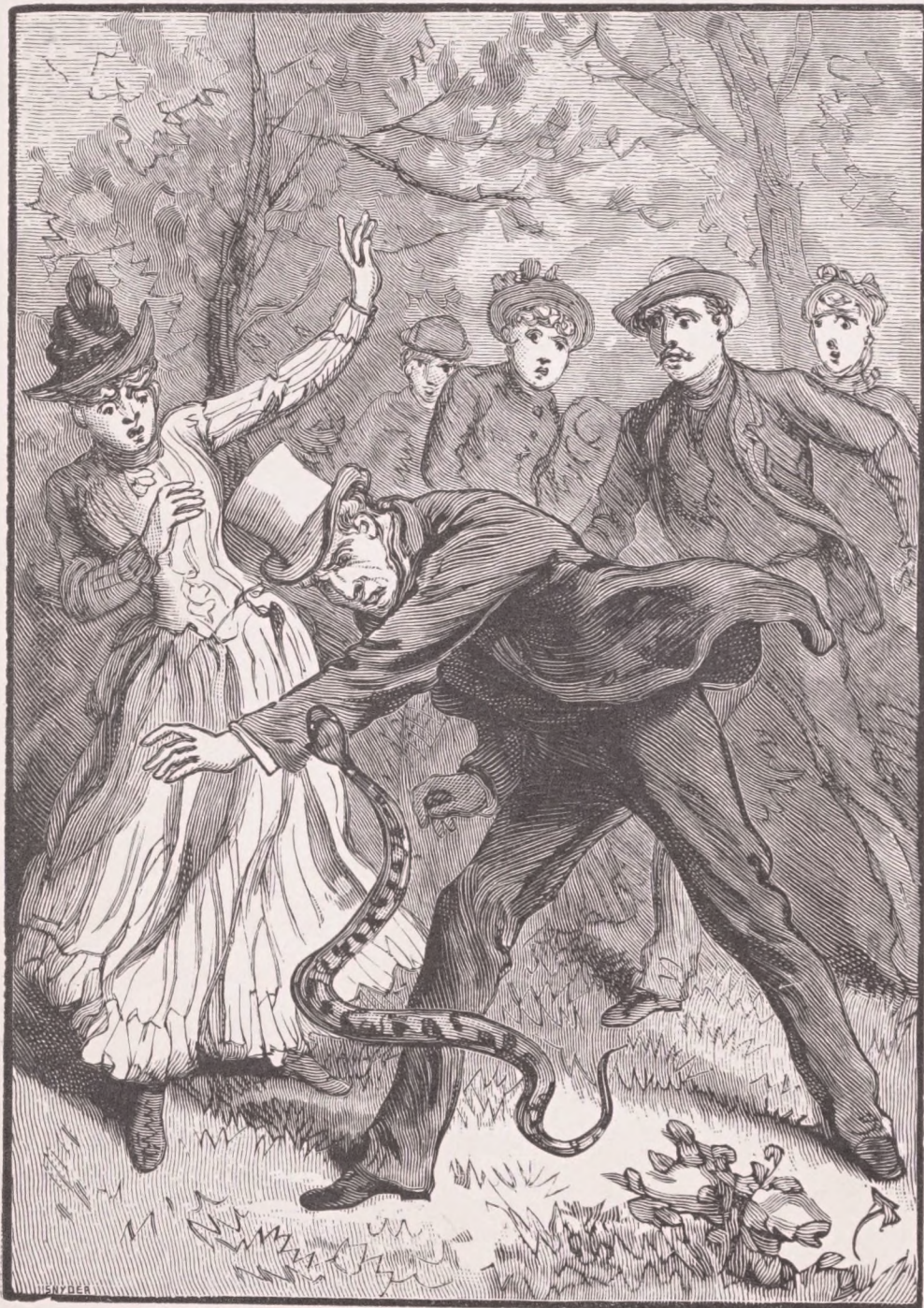
told upon him more. He was, too, the same slightly-built lad of two years before. Daisy, however, had changed the most of all. She was a young lady now; had graduated from the Graded School at Afton, and had been for a year in a young ladies' school of national repute. If she was beautiful as a girl, she is certainly more interesting now as she is just budding into young womanhood. Her golden locks adorn a face of intense loveliness; her bright blue eyes look up almost saucily into yours, while her sweet disposition and earnest Christian spirit win hosts of friends for her wherever she goes. She is a rare scholar, a fine musician, and possesses a voice that would bring her a fortune if she cared to use it for the public. She and Ray are as good friends as ever, and his fine tenor and her soprano blend in wondrous harmony as they sing some of those old matchless hymns of praise unto God. This is not her first visit to Wenton with Ray, and Nettie Branford and she are fast friends, for one tie binds them close together: they are both members of the same royal family, are both daughters of the King.

The next morning dawned bright and beautiful. A delightful day was promised for the picnic, and at an early hour the Wenton Memorial Sunday-school and its friends were off on their five miles' ride to White Rock Lake. This was a beautiful sheet of water, lying at the foot of the highest hill in that part of the State. The

lake afforded fine boating and fishing, while from the summit of the hill a most charming view of the country for forty miles around could be obtained. These two features had made the locality one of great resort by the people for miles around.

A drive of about an hour brought the party to the favored spot, and soon the large grove by the lake rang with the merry voices of the happy children at their play. Some played at hide and seek, some used the swings, some ran off to the boats, some played on the sandy beach, or tossed stones into the shining ripples. After two or three hours of amusement, the children were called together for dinner; and when this had been eaten there was to be Ray's address, and the singing of familiar songs. Before the children had well gotten into their places, however, a piercing scream was heard a short distance away. A glance showed Daisy Lawton part way up the hillside, where she had gone with several other young ladies in search of wild flowers, and from her lips there came for the second time that piercing scream. A number ran at once toward her, and when near enough they beheld the cause of her alarm. She had stooped to pluck a bunch of flowers just in front of her, when a large red or copper-back snake had crawled out from a thicket near by; and now, with its bright eyes fastened upon her with a power she could not resist, was slowly creeping toward her for its fatal strike.





Black Forge Mills.

Those who had run thither from the neighborhood of the table would hardly have been in time to save the terrified girl, however. But only a short distance away, and coming down from the hilltop, was Mr. Branford. He heard the girl's cry, and saw her danger, and sprang down the hill with tremendous bounds. The hand Daisy had extended to pluck the flowers was still held, as though paralyzed, in that position, and as Mr. Branford reached her side the snake was already coiled for its spring. He had no weapon with him, and he did the only thing he could do in the brief instant remaining to him to save the girl. He quickly thrust his own arm before hers and received the stroke that otherwise would have fallen upon her fair hand. Then shaking off the snake, he ground it to pieces beneath his heavy boots.

The greatest confusion now followed. Some bore the fainting but uninjured girl to the nearest house; others took care of the bitten man. Horses were harnessed, Mr. Branford was hurried into a wagon, and driven off to the nearest doctor. The rest, with no heart to continue the festivities, made ready for a return home.

Ray and George had accompanied their father. He was perfectly calm. "There is but one way to save me, my lads," he said, "and that I cannot permit. Liquor would perhaps, if taken in large quantities, nullify this poison, but it would awaken a serpent more to be feared.

Take me home. I am willing to die, now that sweet young life is saved."

They carried him home, and a physician was brought. The wound was cauterized, but to no purpose; the poison had already entered the whole system.

"There is but one thing we can do," said the physician. "Liquor must be poured down him until he is stupefied. It is our only chance to save him."

"We will not take it, then," replied Mr. Branford, resolutely. "It would only awaken the slumbering appetite I have for the accursed stuff; and I cannot live a drunkard, but I can die a sober man."

No persuasion would get him to yield.

George and Ray stayed by him to the last. He suffered terribly. When the end was near, he was still calm in mind, and could talk. Suddenly he cried out: "I'm ready. What is that Scripture, Ray—'Though I walk—though I walk——' "

Ray instantly repeated the sublime and comforting words: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

"That's it! that's it!" cried the dying man. "I'm going down the valley, but I fear no evil; for he is with me." His voice failed—a single gasp—and he had passed through the valley of the shadow into the infinite light.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE WIDENESS OF GOD'S MERCY.

THE unfortunate but heroic death of Mr. Branford attracted wide attention, and the Wenton Memorial Chapel was filled to overflowing on the day of his funeral. Mr. Carleton officiated, and he dwelt only upon the last few months of the deceased's life. He alluded to his quiet but unassuming hope in Christ. He recalled the fact that Jesus' own words were: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Then he told, in thrilling tones, how Mr. Branford had heroically thrust his own arm before the venomous reptile, to receive the blow that otherwise would have fallen upon another. As he spoke of his absolute refusal to take the intoxicating draught, and mentioned the dying man's last words, there was scarcely a dry eye in that throng; and there were few indeed who did not agree with Mr. Carleton's closing declaration: "He died looking to Jesus for salvation." The lifeless body was then laid by that of the Christian wife who had died some years before, and of whom the dying man had spoken with almost his last breath.

Ray remained at Wenton for a while after the funeral,

but about the first of July he went down to Long Point farm, not so much for the wages he could earn, as for the love he still had for his old home. He always received a welcome there that made him rejoice to go ; then, too, he had lost none of his love for the farm and the dwellers there, for the stock, or for the bright blue sea that tossed its waves upon the shore. There was something restful in those quiet but charming surroundings, and Ray felt that under their influence he grew in mind and spirit, and in his communion with God. "I don't wonder," he often used to say, "that the Master spent so much of his time, performed some of his grandest miracles, and uttered some of his most precious truths, by the Sea of Galilee. His words and his deeds have a new meaning to me as I read them by the tossing waves."

So through July and August, Ray toiled about the farm, or sat and read on the seashore. Then September came, and he must soon get ready to return to Easton for his last year at Clinton Academy. He decided to spend a few days with George at Wenton, and with friends in Afton, before his return ; and so this would be his last night at the farm. After supper, he strolled down to the shore alone, and, sitting down upon the little wharf, he looked up toward Afton, which could be dimly seen in the fast fading twilight.

His mind soon became busy with the reminiscences of the past few years. How often had he gone up that bay

to Afton! Just down around that point Edward Lawton had come on the night of the storm, and he had gone out to save him. How good God had been to Edward and himself! How gracious God had been to his loved ones! George and the girls were all serving Christ. The father had died trusting in the Saviour. Where were Tom and Dick? Nothing had been heard of them since they, four years before, had escaped from the county jail. Were they alive? Had God reached and saved them also? How he would like to know! An overwhelming sense of the Master's nearness and the Master's goodness came over him; and for a while he sat there absorbed in these contemplations, and rejoicing in his soul.

Then his mood changed. A bright gleam came into his eye, a smile played upon his lips. Another friend had come to mind—Daisy Lawton. Daisy was a great deal in Ray's thoughts lately—more than he himself perhaps realized. He recalled her narrow escape at the picnic, and somehow he felt a thrill of satisfaction deep down in his heart that it was *his* father who had saved her, though at the expense of his own life. Had not that act in a measure atoned for the stain that had rested upon his father's name? Would he not dare now to speak of a matter that had long been hid in his heart, and which he had felt he dare not make known with that father's disgrace still resting upon him? It certainly seemed to

him that the father's heroic death altered the whole situation. He could not help feeling it did. Anyway, by-and-by he would venture to speak to Daisy of this matter which so intimately concerned him at least. Nor did he think that she would be altogether indifferent respecting it. "What a friend she has been to me all these years!" he thought, his heart swelling with joy and gratitude. There was, as the reader has already discovered, a deeper feeling there—a feeling of deep, passionate love. He was slowly waking up to it; but he did not know it was to cost him the greatest struggle of his life.

His thoughts so pre-occupied his mind he did not notice that the shades of night had already fallen heavily around, and that a dense fog, drenching everything it touched, was slowly rolling up the bay. Nor did he notice that a boat, with a single oarsman therein, was pulling down the harbor directly toward him, until he heard his name called.

Looking up almost in alarm at the suddenness of the call, he saw the boat had stopped a rod or two away; and the occupant, whoever he was, now called again:

"Ray, is that you?"

There was something familiar in those tones, and yet Ray could not tell who it was. He promptly answered, however:

"Yes; but who are you?"

The boatman, instead of replying, resumed his oars and came directly into the wharf. Jumping out of the boat,

he fastened it to a ring in the dock, and then turned and faced the lad.

"Ray, don't you know me?" he asked.

Again there was something familiar in the man's tones, but surely that tall, robust, and well-dressed man was a stranger.

"No, sir," replied Ray, after scrutinizing him for a few minutes, "I do not think I do, though your voice seems familiar."

"Four years such as I have seen make a vast difference in a man. No wonder you do not know me," the gentleman remarked, somewhat sadly.

Four years! Those two words let a flood of light stream into Ray's mind.

"Tom!" exclaimed he; "can it be possible it is you?"

"Yes; it is no other," the man replied, with a pleasant laugh. "I don't wonder you are surprised to see me."

"I certainly am," replied Ray, with heartiness, "and I'm glad you have returned. But where is Dick?"

"He is dead," answered Tom, solemnly; "but it is a long story I have to tell you. It can wait till you tell me of the home friends, and where they all are. I got into New York a few days ago, and securing a leave of absence I started for my native State. Reaching Afton this afternoon, I went down to the Forge to find the mills in ruins, and half the tenement houses empty. I ran in with a man who told me the mills were burned,

but he knew nothing about the Branfords who used to live there, except that was the name of one of the men who had been sent to prison for helping to fire the mills. I then took a boat and came down here to see if I could learn anything of your whereabouts. I knew it was not under the pleasantest circumstances that Dick and I left home, but I am thankful to say that old life has been abandoned, I trust, forever."

"You are a Christian, then, Tom?" Ray asked, eagerly.

"I am thankful I have a Saviour," he answered, reverently.

"And Dick?" asked Ray, almost in suspense.

"He died trusting in Jesus. It was his happy death that, under God, brought me to the Master. But I'll tell you the whole story soon. Now where are father, and George and the girls; and how about yourself? Don't keep anything from me, however bitter it may be. I will help you bear the burden. I'm just hungry for any news. Haven't heard a word, you know, in four years. So drive away, Ray."

Ray rapidly related the changes those four years had brought in the family circle, and with which the reader is already familiar. Tom, in his turn, was delighted to learn that all were now Christians, and that the father, sad and recent as his death was, had not died without a hope.

"God has led us all to himself, Ray," he said, with deep

emotion; "and what a change even in our worldly surroundings it makes to be followers of Jesus. George is superintendent of a mill; Nettie is a bookkeeper; you are nearly through with an academic course on your way to college; the two older girls are in Christian homes of their own, and I am first officer of as fine a ship as sails the ocean. Who would have thought these things possible?"

"It is all of God," replied Ray, with no less emotion. "But come, Tom, the fog is drenching us. Let us go up to the house. You will stay with me to-night."

Having made sure that the boat was properly secured, the two brothers walked up to the house. Ray left Tom at the door a few moments, while he went in to explain to Mr. Woodhull who his unexpected visitor was, and the change that had taken place in him. Mr. Woodhull gave the wanderer a cordial welcome, and, after a supper had been furnished him, he said:

"Mr. Woodhull, you have given me a kindly welcome here to-night, and it is no more than fair that you should hear my story. I left home under circumstances that give you the right to question whether I am now worthy of your friendship and hospitality. I have not yet related to Ray the strange narrative of my wanderings, and how Dick and I, far from home and among strangers, were brought to Jesus. If you and your wife and mother care to hear the story, I will, without going too much into de-

tail, tell it to you, feeling sure that you will agree with me that it is a striking illustration of how Christ can save to the uttermost. It scarcely seems possible that I could have gone away from here only four years ago a criminal fleeing from merited punishment, and now return 'a sinner saved by grace.' Yet such has been the will of God."

"We shall be glad to listen to your story," Mr. Woodhull remarked, pleasantly; so, with a low bow of thanks, Tom began:

"On the night, four years ago, when my brother and I escaped from the county jail, where we were awaiting our trial, we fled to the nearest seaport, and found a brig named the Sea Witch about to sail for Brazil. The captain was short of hands, and anxious to leave port on the flood tide, so he was not very particular as to our history. We both were able-bodied men, and that was the most he cared about, and after a few questions he shipped us as green hands before the mast. Ten hours later we were out of sight of land, beyond the reach of the pursuing officers, and that was the most Dick and I thought of. We little knew then that he would never return to his native land, and that four long years would pass ere I again should see these familiar shores."

He bowed his head upon his hands for a moment, as though overcome by some sudden recollection, and then he continued:

“We had a long and rough passage, for we met storm after storm, and the old brig was far from being staunch and seaworthy. Added to this, our captain proved to be a tyrant, and not only half starved us, but manifested his cruelty on the slightest occasion. Dick and I wouldn’t have fared much worse if we had stayed at home and gone to prison. When we reached Rio Janeiro we were glad to leave the vessel and go ashore among entire strangers. A few days later Dick came down with the ship fever, and before the week was out I was down with the same disease. We had been stopping at a sailor’s inn, but on our recovery from the delirium into which we both had fallen, we found ourselves in the house of an English missionary. He had found us just as our inhuman host was about to turn us out of his inn to die, and having us removed to his own residence, he tenderly cared for us. It was there the first religious impressions were made upon us—more, however, upon Dick than upon myself. He recovered before I did, and while waiting for my convalescence he had several long religious talks with the missionary’s wife, and was under deep conviction when we shipped on board an English vessel for Liverpool.

“Our captain was a friend of the missionary, and was an earnest Christian also, and he had learned enough about us to be deeply interested in our cases. He gave us each a Bible when we came on board, and secured from each of us a promise to read it. Dick was more faith-

ful to this promise than I, and when our watch brought us forward alone, he would talk of what he had read. One night we had a fearful storm. The wind blew a hurricane, and I never saw such waves as were hurled against us. At times it seemed as if they must overwhelm the ship, she was so deeply laden and labored so heavily. Then for the first time I saw the experiment tried of casting oil upon the troubled waters. The captain had two kegs arranged just at the bow of the vessel, and from each a small stream of oil was constantly pouring upon the tossing waves. The effect was almost magical, for the huge waves were smoothed by the spreading oil, and the ship had a comparatively smooth sea in which to sail.

“Dick and I were sent forward to watch the kegs, and to keep them supplied with oil. All at once Dick gave a cry of joy. ‘I have it! I have it, Tom!’ he cried. ‘Why have I not seen it before? This illustrates our need of a Saviour. The billows of sin compass us about, and are destined eventually to destroy our souls. Then God pours in his saving grace, the billows yield before its magic power, and there comes peace, and we push on into the haven of rest. It is Jesus through whom that grace is obtainable. He alone is the fountain of supply. Faith is the means by which it flows down to us. Praise the Lord, I believe, and that grace is mine.’

“There was no mistaking even in that storm and darkness that the great blessing of salvation had come to him.

The next day he told the captain, and then he began praying for me. We reached Liverpool after a stormy passage. The captain had, for some reason, taken a great liking to Dick, and now took him to his own church, and before we sailed again Dick was baptized. Our next voyage was on the same ship, and with the same captain. Dick wouldn't leave him, and I stayed by Dick. This time we had taken cargo for Hong Kong, and had a long voyage before us. We had been out but a few days when the captain gave Dick some books, and told him if he would only study he would teach him navigation, and fit him to take command of a ship. The lad didn't need any urging, and the way he pored over those books set me to thinking that I might learn navigation too. The captain consented, and, with our other duties, we soon had enough on our hands to keep us busy most of the time. I had long before this left off all drinking and swearing; in fact, the captain wouldn't allow them on board the ship. I began now to read my Bible daily, but no light or peace came.

“We had rounded the Cape, and had made a big run on toward our destination, when a sudden squall struck us. All sail was out at the time, and the crew was ordered aloft to take it in. One fellow named Jones, a green hand, was at work on the mizzen-top-sail, when a strong gust of wind struck him. He let right go of the sail, and clung to the yards for dear life. The loosened

sail was caught by the wind, and the spar was wrenched from its place, and down it came with a great crash to the deck. Dick and I were at the wheel, and saw it coming; but he saw what I did not—that the captain was right under where it, with the next roll of the ship, would strike. With a cry, he let go the wheel, and sprang forward to save the captain. He succeeded in this, but before he could get out of the way himself it struck him upon the back and crushed him to the deck. We picked him up, and at the captain's order carried him into the cabin, but it was soon apparent that he could not live. His back was broken and he was injured internally. Though he suffered greatly, he made no complaint, and was as happy as could be at the thought of meeting his Saviour. About dark it was evident that he was fast sinking.

“‘Tom,’ he suddenly said, though feebly, ‘in my chest you will find a little over a hundred dollars I have saved. Promise me that you will add to it until you have enough to pay Mr. Shephard, at Afton, for what we took from him, and that you will then go back and give it to him. Tell him it was what I was striving to do when this blow came, and that I died trusting in Jesus. And, Tom, try to come to the Saviour: promise me that you will do that also.’ I couldn’t help crying, great strong man as I was, but I gave him the promises he asked. A few minutes later he suddenly raised his hands. ‘I see the

King in his beauty,' he cried; 'crown him! crown him!' And then he died.

"We buried him in the sea the next morning, just as the sun rose above the horizon, and sad and lonely I went about my work. His death made a deep impression upon me. For days I was harassed with thoughts of my own sinfulness. I struggled for light. I tried to pray. But the darkness that surrounded me only seemed to grow more dense. I found no peace. No help came. But one night as I was off watch, and lay in my bunk, there came to me the words I had often heard Dick repeat. So plainly did I hear them, and so like Dick's voice did the message sound, I could have almost believed it was he speaking: 'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin;' and with those words there came light. I now saw that the only way I could be saved was by accepting that Son as my substitute. I just cried aloud for help, 'Lord, I need thee; wilt thou not save?' And with that cry peace came. I knew I was heard. I was saved.

"But I am making a long story. The captain felt drawn to me for Dick's act, and when we reached Hong Kong he put me in as second mate. We went from there to Australia, and then back to England. Over three years had now elapsed, and I had added enough to Dick's money to pay Mr. Shephard in full for his loss. I felt, too, I must come and acknowledge my sin, and, if Mr.

Shephard so desired, to meet its penalty. I therefore resolved to come home at once. The captain easily got a place for me as first mate on a ship sailing for New York, and there I landed a few days ago. To-morrow I shall call upon Mr. Shephard and pay him principal and interest for the injury he received from us. If he then desires to continue the case against me, I will suffer the penalty for my crime. I feel it is the only right thing to do—to go back to the hour of my sin and make all possible reparation, whatever the consequences to myself.”

“I hardly think he will push the case,” said Mr. Woodhull. “He must be convinced of your change of heart by your very desire to settle with him.”

“I have letters from the English captain and from the captain of my present ship testifying to my good character, and I trust Mr. Shephard may be willing to give me a trial before he prosecutes the case. I am willing he should hold it over me, and call it up whenever he has any reason to suspect I am playing the hypocrite,” said Tom.

The next morning, Mr. Woodhull and Ray accompanied him to Mr. Shephard’s store. That gentleman listened in silence to the wanderer’s story, until he concluded by counting down six hundred dollars on to the office table, saying, “That belongs to you, sir.”

Then Mr. Shephard said: “No, it doesn’t. I got most of the goods back, and two hundred dollars will pay me

for all my trouble and all costs." And he pushed four hundred dollars back toward Tom.

"I much prefer for you to take it all," Tom said.

"Not a cent more," replied Mr. Shephard, decisively.

"What will you do about my prosecution, sir?" asked Tom, with some trace of anxiety. "I am willing to answer for my crime if it seems best to you."

"Do you really mean that?" asked Mr. Shephard.

"Yes, sir," replied Tom, stoutly. "I measured the cost when I came here. I might have sent you the money without coming in person. But I felt the only right thing to do was to come directly to you, and take the full consequences of my act. I have letters here from the two captains I have sailed with since I became a Christian, and I wish you might feel confidence enough in me to give me a fair trial. But I shall abide by your decision, only I would like to know the worst."

"Well," said Mr. Shephard, after reading the letters, "this is what I shall do. I shall immediately take steps to have your case rendered *nolle prosequi*. And now"—with a merry twinkle in his eye—"I want you all to go home with me to dinner."

As he shook hands heartily with Tom, he added: "I only hope the Lord has forgiven my sins as fully as I have forgiven you. I once caused Ray's arrest when he was innocent; I'll now settle the score with him by letting

you who were guilty go free." And he marched them all off to dinner.

Tom and Ray took an afternoon train for Wenton. George and the sisters welcomed the long-absent brother with joy and thankfulness when they learned that he too was a follower of Jesus. For the third time the wanderer told his story, and this time he disclosed an additional fact. "I have never united with Christ's Church," he said, "because I felt I could not properly do so until I had atoned as far as possible for my crime. But when I saw your chapel here, I thought with exultation, 'Now I can do so.' When, George, do you have your next preparatory meeting?"

"In two weeks," answered George. "Mr. Carleton, of Afton, will come down at that time and remain over Sunday with us. We shall be glad to have you go forward with us then."

"That will do, nicely," responded Tom. "I must go back to New York to-morrow, as I have but four days absence. The captain has not yet been to see his family, and wants me to take charge of the ship while he is absent; but I will run up in two weeks, and spend that Sunday with you."

The next evening George, Betsy, and Ray sat in the parlor of the little cottage, talking over Tom's return home, and the evidence he gave of a change of life.

"Every one of us has been led to Jesus," remarked

George. "Father, Dick, and all the living. We began with you, Ray; and who would have thought then that the result would now be what it is? What is the lesson we are to learn from it?"

"That God will surely answer the prayer of faith," said Betsy.

"Yes," assented George, "and I think we are also taught that nothing is impossible unto God. What do you think, Ray?"

"That we as a family illustrate the unlimited mercy of God," he reverently answered.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE LAST YEAR AT EASTON.

WHEN Ray reached Clinton Academy, he found a note awaiting him from the merchant whose deformed son he taught. It simply requested that he should call at the merchant's place of business as soon as possible after his arrival. So, early in the afternoon, Ray went down to the city. He found the merchant in his office, and was received with some show of cordiality.

"I am glad to find you have returned, Mr. Branford," he said, "and have sent for you to see if you would be willing to take another scholar in addition to my son. I have a widowed sister, who has now returned to Easton and will make my house her home. She has a daughter but two months younger than my boy, who is a cripple; was made so by the same accident that deformed her cousin. By the way, has Louis ever told you how he came to be deformed?"

"No, sir," Ray answered. "I have purposely avoided asking him anything about it. I knew he was extremely sensitive, and so have tried to draw his thoughts away from his deformity, and teach him to believe that the all important thing is a beauty of soul."

The merchant nodded approvingly, and then told the story of the accident: "It was the summer Louis was four years old. My sister was visiting us with her little girl, and my wife, who was living then, spent much time riding about the city and its suburbs with her and the two children. I had a new coachman, but he seemed to be thoroughly reliable, and I had no thought of danger, though I knew the horses were exceedingly high-spirited. It seems, however, that the fellow drank occasionally, and one morning, when my wife had ordered the carriage to be driven around to the door for a ride, she found that he was tipsy. At first she thought of postponing the drive. Would that she had done so! But it was the last opportunity my sister would have to ride out, as on the morrow she was to return home, and they had arranged an excursion to Weetunk Lake, five or six miles from here. Finally, much against her better judgment, my wife decided to go.

"They reached the lake, and were riding along a steep bank on the west side, when, for some unaccountable reason, the horses became frightened, and the driver in his drunken condition was unable to manage them, and down the bank they plunged. The carriage was overturned and crushed against some trees, while the liberated horses and driver were hurled down into the lake. They escaped serious injury, as also did my wife and sister. But both children were caught under the broken

carriage ; and, when removed, it was found that my boy's back was injured, and one limb of my sister's little girl was wrenched almost from its socket : one was deformed, the other crippled for life."

"Yet how merciful was it that their lives were spared!" remarked Ray.

"Merciful!" cried the merchant, with intense bitterness. "A strange mercy, it seems to me. Why, I am more merciful than that! If I could, I would not have allowed a defect, nor a pain to have come to my beautiful child."

"God never does wrong," replied Ray, simply; "and even inscrutable providences are overshadowed by mercy, though we may not see it."

"It would take a great deal to make me believe that," muttered the merchant.

Ray forgot that the gentleman before him was Mr. Grafton, the proudest and richest merchant in the city. He forgot for the moment that he was father to his pupil, and the very man who, if offended, could take from him the very means by which he hoped to pay his way in the academy. He forgot that he was perhaps trespassing upon the valuable time of the merchant, and that his own business with him was not yet completed. I say Ray forgot these things; perhaps it would be more correct to say that he lost sight of them for a time, because a more important thing had already taken possession of

his mind. He remembered only that the man before him had questioned the wisdom and mercy of the God he loved and served. Had he a right to let this fact go unnoticed? Would he not, in a sense, be denying his Lord if he did? Whatever others may have thought under the circumstances, this was the view Ray took of the case; therefore, he said, politely, but firmly:

“I beg your pardon, sir, but may not God in his wisdom know better than we what is best for us; and may he not in his mercy, knowing just what is before us, send a light affliction upon us to save us from a more terrible evil that otherwise would have befallen us?”

“How do you make that out?” asked the merchant, partly in surprise and partly in curiosity. Surprise that this young man should have dared to take up the gauntlet many an older Christian would have entirely ignored; curiosity as to how he would defend himself now that he had assumed the task.

“Well,” said Ray, boldly, “if a robber should seize in your house a casket full of rare jewels, would you not justify one who should rescue them, even though in this process the casket should be marred?”

“I rather think I should,” the merchant answered.

“Perhaps,” said Ray, “God wrought thus with your boy; and the casket was marred that the gem might be saved. Neither I nor you may understand it, but it will bring vast comfort to believe it.”

"Perhaps it may be so," replied the merchant, thoughtfully. "The boy has unusually deep religious impressions for one so young. He is like his mother in that. Since her death I have perhaps allowed myself to grow too bitter and hard of heart." Then, as if ashamed of his acknowledgment, he said, somewhat brusquely: "How about taking the extra scholar? Of course, you are to have double pay."

"Indeed, sir; I had not expected that," said Ray, gratefully. "You pay me very liberally, and I am willing to take your niece without extra compensation."

"I am very pleased with the progress Louis is making, and he is very much attached to you. If you only do as well with the two, we shall be abundantly satisfied. We shall insist, however, upon your taking double pay," responded Mr. Grafton, turning to his desk.

"Thank you, sir," answered Ray, rising to go. "And you are not offended at my defense of One who is dearer to me than aught else."

Again Mr. Grafton looked curiously at him. "You have done no harm, young man, if you have done no good," he grimly replied. "Good-afternoon, sir."

"Good-afternoon," replied Ray, leaving the office with a great wish in his heart that he could have plead better the cause he had espoused; but though he did not know it, he had exerted an influence that day destined yet to produce important results.

The weeks glided swiftly by. The fall term at the academy ended just before Thanksgiving; the winter term began immediately after. Ray's pay from his two pupils enabled him now to be entirely independent of his friends; in fact, he was saving something toward his prospective college course.

Early in the beginning of the new year, a well-known evangelist, and one whose fame as a successful Christian worker was in all the churches, visited Easton. Union services were held in the largest hall of the city, and though the evangelist remained but a short time, an unprecedented religious awakening took place. Religion became the theme of conversation on the streets, at the places of business, and in the homes. With the departure of the evangelist, the churches, dividing the city into districts, vigorously carried on the work.

In the suburbs of the city, near the academy, was a young but growing church. Here Ray, on coming to Easton, though he did not sever his connection with the First Church, Afton, had made his religious home. He became a teacher in the Sunday-school. He frequently led the prayer meetings; and so efficient had he proved himself in all religious work, that when this thorough awakening on the part of the churches came, Mr. Gage, the pastor of the young church, pressed him into full service. It fell upon Ray to take charge of the evening services whenever Mr. Gage was detained elsewhere.

One evening when he was in charge of the services, he was quite surprised to see Mr. Grafton, the merchant, some time after the meeting had begun, enter the room and take a back seat. Ray knew that the chapel was the nearest place of worship to the merchant's palatial residence, but he had never known him to enter its doors before. Indeed, he seldom ever went to church anywhere, and when he did, it was at one of the most aristocratic and fashionable churches farther down town. This made his entrance into the chapel now all the more noticeable. He paid the strictest attention to the remarks and prayers of those who took part in the services, and even once or twice added his deep bass to the familiar songs that were sung. Near the hour for closing he arose, and said:

"I arise to-night not because I can testify to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. I know nothing about it. In fact, I do not even understand it. I believe intellectually in the existence of a God, and in Jesus Christ as his Son. I am willing to admit that, the Bible is his book. Farther than that, I cannot honestly say I am now prepared to go. But I would like to know what it is to have Jesus for an intimate and personal friend, such as many here to-night have testified he is to them. I would like to know that I am saved. I would give all I am worth to-night to know that peace which is said to pass all understanding."

He paused, and made as though he would sit down; then he went on, hurriedly:

“For weeks, yea months, I have been in a state of unrest. Ever since the day the leader of this meeting had the courage to speak to me in my office in defense of his Lord, I may say I have had no peace. The burden is getting too great for me to bear. I feel I must have light soon, or I shall sink in sheer despair.”

Amid a marked stillness that had fallen over the meeting at this unexpected circumstance, some one began to pray. It was Mr. Gage, the pastor, who had entered the room in time to hear Mr. Grafton's words. When his fervent appeal that God would give this man light for Jesus' sake had ended, and the meeting had closed, Mr. Grafton thanked the pastor somewhat haughtily for the interest he had manifested for him, and immediately left the room. When Ray entered the street, however, he found the merchant waiting for him.

“Mr. Branford,” he asked, “are you willing I should walk up to the academy with you?”

Ray gladly consented, and they walked on for a short distance in silence. When far enough from all others to be unheard, the great man inquired:

“Would it be asking too much, Mr. Branford, for you to tell me as simply as possible how I am to be saved?”

This man, who had been so haughty when in the presence of others, was very humble now.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," replied Ray, quickly. And then he silently asked the Master to help him in leading this anxious soul to him.

"Yes; I know," said the merchant. "I have studied those words for weeks. But what do they mean to you?"

"Taking Christ at his word; accepting just what he offers. He tells us that he came to die as our substitute, and, if we will only believe it, he will hold that relation to us. We are to believe it, and show our faith by living up to the fact," said Ray.

The word "substitute" caught Mr. Grafton's attention.

"Substitute!" he exclaimed. "How is he our substitute? How can he be? That is just where my difficulty lies."

Ray gave a deep sigh. How he wished for Mr. Carleton, or even Mr. Gage, to have been there just then! He felt so unable to cope with this great truth, and make it plain to this haughty inquirer; and yet it is doubtful if any one else could have helped the great man at all. He would not have listened to any one as he did to that lad.

"I admit," said Ray, slowly, as though measuring every word, "that there are difficulties in the way of our comprehending just *how* such a thing could be; but shall we for that reason reject it? We have the fact. May we not accept it and act in accordance with it, even if we

do not fully understand all about it? How many times, Mr. Grafton, we do that very thing with reference to the things of this life. I noticed, when down at your office, that you had direct telegraph connection with some of our large cities. Electricity is the agent that you employ to transmit your messages. Do you understand just the nature of it? Why is it that it has such a strong affinity for some things that they become first-class conductors, while other things are as perfect non-conductors? Some things about it you understand; some things about it are still a mystery. But you accept the fact that it will transmit your message, and make use of it daily in your business; and it accomplishes your purpose.

“Now, I admit that the idea of ‘God manifest in the flesh,’ and becoming a substitute for sinful man, is surrounded with great difficulties. Paul himself has written: ‘And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.’ But the fact is indisputable. Before you came into the meeting to-night I had read for our evening lesson the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. It is wonderful how the idea of Christ as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin is brought out there in nearly every verse. If not so, what are you going to do with such passages as these: ‘Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows’; ‘He was wounded for our

transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed'? No other ultimate thought could the prophet have had in mind but that the Messiah of whom he here speaks was to die in the sinner's stead.

"Turning to the New Testament, we find its confirmation in *the way* Christ died, and in declarations like these: 'For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.' 'God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' 'He tasted death for every man.' 'He was made a curse for us.' Great as may be the mystery of it, here is an indisputable Scriptural fact. Those who have accepted it, and used it according to direction, and with the proper instrument of faith, have found it to accomplish their purpose, just as much as the subtle and mysterious current you call electricity when properly used produces its expected results. Take him at his word, and see if he does not do just as he promises.

"Pardon me for speaking plainly, but do not hope to go to Jesus, feeling that you are Mr. Grafton, the leading and most influential merchant of Easton, and that you would like to have him do you the honor of becoming your substitute. But go to him as Mr. Grafton the sinner, who must perish except he shall save, and there humbly plead his own promise, 'in nowise to cast out them that come unto him.'"

It was a plain, bold speech ; but Ray, with no thought of anything but this man's great need, spoke with all that earnestness and eloquence for which he was noted, and Mr. Grafton listened with the profoundest attention. They had now reached the academy, and Mr. Grafton stopped.

"Light is coming," he said. "It ought to, with such plain preaching as you have done. God bless you, and please pray for me." And he turned and walked rapidly away.

The very next evening, however, he was at the meeting ; and, rising, he made an humble confession of Christ, that touched every heart there. This was not entirely unexpected to Ray, though, for that afternoon, when he had gone at the usual hour to teach his pupils, he had been greeted by Louis, with the words :

"Oh, Mr. Branford, my papa loves Jesus now, and he is going to attend the same chapel where you go ; and Aunt Amy will go too, and they say Susie and I may join the Sunday-school. Aren't you glad ?"

Ray was indeed glad ; and not long after Mr. Grafton and his sister united with that young, struggling church. They came there, moreover, to be earnest workers for the Master, and their great wealth from that hour was also consecrated to the Master's use.

So busy now was Ray with his studies and his work for the Lord, that almost before he could realize it was

possible the last of May had come, and with it the closing examinations of the year. When these were over, it was found that Ray not only led his class, but that he held the highest rank ever attained by any graduate of the institution. Edward Lawton ranked second, and once more the two friends were brought into the same relation at their graduation—Edward taking the salutatory and Ray the valedictory.

Mr. Phillips, the principal, had looked forward to this commencement with commendable pride. He felt that his two leading scholars would honor him and the institute not only by their high scholarship and their earnest Christian character, but also as eloquent and forcible speakers. Particularly was this true of Ray. He had already developed rare ability as a writer and a speaker. His thoughts were always fresh and original, and his language appropriate and well chosen, while he possessed a voice of marked richness, flexibility, and power. He knew that the fame of both these lads had already gone out from the school, and would doubtless draw a host of the friends of the academy together on the graduating day.

Nor was he mistaken. The day dawned as bright and beautiful as a June day well could, and the audience filled the academic hall to its fullest capacity. Among those who were gathered there might have been noticed quite a number who are old friends of the reader. From

After there were Mrs. Lawton and Daisy, Mr. and Mrs. Carleton, Mr. and Mrs. George Woodhull, Jacob Woodhull, Miss Squire and her eccentric father, who had lost none of his interest in Ray. Mr. Greenough, Mr. Shephard, Mr. Bacon, Dr. Gasque, and Sailor Jack had also come. From Wenton were all the Branfords, and with them was Captain Tom, who had arrived from his first voyage as commander of a ship, just in time to run up with the others to Easton. All of these, of course, had special reasons for being interested in the two who bore off the chief honors of the day.

But there was another, an aged gentleman, who sat in the very front seat of the hall, and listened with rapt attention to the two lads as they gracefully took their places, and eloquently and forcibly delivered their addresses. It was Mr. Swinburne, older and feebler by four years now than when Ray had first met him at the university grounds of a neighboring metropolis, but still quite hale and hearty for his fourscore years. What he thought of the lads may be seen by an interview he sought with them a few hours later.

“Young gentlemen,” he said, shaking hands cordially with them, “I listened with great pleasure to you to-day. I was even more pleased to learn from your principal the marked position you have held throughout your course of study as followers of Jesus. I have heard of a certain set of resolutions you placed above your study table, on

coming to this institution, and thus at the outset of your academic life took a position for the Master which by his grace you have steadily maintained. Now I have a favor to ask of each of you. I understand you will in the fall enter the university of which I am a graduate. I have there, as here, established scholarships to which I still hold the right to appoint the recipients. Two will be vacant at the beginning of the next academic year. May I have the privilege of naming you two young men as the ones who in my humble judgment are worthy to receive their benefits?"

With grateful thanks the two friends accepted the kind old gentleman's offer, and he departed with an air that seemed to imply he had been favored, not that he had conferred a favor.

"Well, chum," remarked Ray, when they were alone, "I do not see but both of us have a fair outlook for our college course. Thanks to our friend Mr. Swinburne, our tuition and room rent are provided for, and only our board and incidentals remain. Surely, with our experience here, we have no reason to falter in the undertaking."

"That is so," said Edward, thoughtfully, "and I think I shall be able to go through college without any help from mother. We have friends in that city, and through them I hope to secure employment for you as well as for myself."

“Always thinking of me, Ned,” said Ray, throwing his arm affectionately around his chum; “but we will borrow no trouble. Those same old rules shall go to the university with us; the same principles shall actuate our hearts; we shall look ever to the same Master for his guidance and blessing. Why need we then have any fear? His name to us is Jehovah-jireh—the Lord will provide.”

“Amen,” said Edward, gently and reverently. And then the two passed out from those academic halls to new duties and a new phase of life.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A SUMMER'S VACATION.

RAY and Edward left Easton on the same train with their Afton and Wenton friends. All, in fact, had taken seats in the same car, and a bright, merry, vivacious company they made. Captain Tom Branford had reversed the seat in front of Mr. Squire and his daughter, and was apparently listening with marked attention to the old general's vehement praise of an institution that had been wise enough to confer its highest honors upon two Afton boys; but in reality he was studying the daughter's fair face with an admiration so manifest she could not have failed to detect it, had she not been engrossed by another matter quite outside of herself. Her thoughts were on her "two boys," as she called them, and remembering what they, by divine grace, had become, she "thanked God and took courage" for those of her class who were still unsaved.

Mr. Carleton, Mr. Bacon, George Branford and Sailor Jack had taken seats somewhat apart from the others, and the four were busily engaged in talking over some matter in low, earnest tones. Edward Lawton and his mother, Mr. and Mrs. George Woodhull, and Jacob

Woodhull formed another group, and their conversation was with reference to the latest rumor on the streets of Afton—namely, that iron ore in paying quantities had been found in the hills back of that village, and that parties interested desired to buy the old Forge site and water privilege, that they might establish a smelting furnace and iron works there. For three of this group there was special interest in this rumor; for if true, it meant unexpected financial gain to them. Mrs. Lawton and Edward knew that the sale of the Black Forge water privilege and tenement houses would bring them no small sum, from a property that for four years had been absolutely non-productive; while Mr. Jacob Woodhull knew that he was by far the largest owner of the wild and rugged tract on the mountain where the ore was said to have been discovered. The shrewd old gentleman admitted to Mrs. Lawton that negotiations had already been entered into with him for the purchase of this land, and that on his acceptance of the liberal offer made him there would be no doubt but that the Black Forge property could be sold.

Doctor Gasque, Mr. Shephard, Mrs. Carleton, Mrs. Bacon, Mrs. George Branford, and the others of the vivacious company were grouped on both sides of the aisle near the centre of the car. Ray occupied a seat with Daisy Lawton, near enough to the others to join in the animated conversation, yet far enough away for him

and his fair companion to occasionally converse in low tones of the studies each had been specially interested in during the past year—of the work each had tried to do for the Master, and of the hopes they had of greater spiritual growth and higher usefulness in that Master's service.

"Shall you, when your studies are completed, choose work on the home or some foreign field?" Daisy had asked, with unusual interest.

"I have not decided," Ray answered. "I do not think much about that yet. I am just trying to do each day's work for Jesus as it comes. I simply want him to show me the work; and whatever it is, or wherever it is, I am ready to go." He had special reason to remember those words at a later period.

The car they were on went through to Afton without change, and the minutes passed away so swiftly and pleasantly, it seemed almost incredible when the brakeman announced that the next station would be Afton. At this announcement, however, Mr. Carleton arose from his seat, and came along where Ray and Daisy were sitting.

"Miss Daisy," he asked, somewhat roguishly, "is Ray going to stop at Afton, or is he going on to Wenton to-night?"

A slight flush passed over the fair face, but she frankly replied: "He stops at Afton to-night, I believe, sir."

"I might have known it," remarked Mr. Carleton, with an emphasis that changed the slight flush on her face to the deepest crimson; then to Ray: "Will you come up to the parsonage before you go on down to Wenton? There is a matter I wish to talk over with you."

"Certainly, sir; shall I disturb you if I come up early in the morning? I want to go on down to Wenton in the afternoon so as to see Tom for a while before he goes back to his ship."

"Any time after nine and before twelve will do," responded Mr. Carleton, going on then to where his wife and Mrs. Bacon were sitting.

Ray turned to his companion: "What plan have my Afton friends arranged now?" he asked.

"How should I know?" she answered, demurely. Ray looked down into the bright eyes that gazed up into his, but if they knew what the matter was that Mr. Carleton desired to "talk over," they kept their secret well. He could not even tell whether the fair girl before him had any knowledge of that matter or not, though he strongly suspected she had.

"My friends mean to ruin me by doing too much for me," he finally said.

"Few would think so, judging from the effect of the past favors on you, sir," she remarked, significantly.

Ray's face grew thoughtful instantly. "I have tried to show them I appreciated their favors in the only

way I could—by making the most of myself,” he replied.

“No one who knows you can doubt that,” she responded, with tones of mingled admiration and pride, while a bright smile came to her lips and a far-off look to her eyes, as though she had thought of something peculiarly pleasant to herself.

He had no time to reply, for the train was at the Afton station, and he assisted Mrs. Lawton and Daisy to a carriage, while Edward looked out for the baggage; then all drove off toward the Lawton cottage. As they turned on to the avenue, General Squire’s handsome equipage dashed by them, and to Ray’s astonishment he saw his brother Tom sitting opposite the general and his daughter, evidently on his way to the Squire mansion for the night. The comical look that passed over his face at the discovery was evidently noticed by Tom, who raised his hat with a remarkable flourish in return. Possibly Miss Squire had also noticed the expression on Ray’s face, for she looked up toward the young man in front of her with an amused smile.

Not far from nine o’clock the next morning Ray rang the door bell at the First Church parsonage, and was immediately shown to Mr. Carleton’s study. That gentleman on his entrance whirled around in his study chair, and asked: “Ray, what are you going to do this summer?”

"Anything I can find to do," replied Ray, taking an easy chair, and looking over to his pastor with a smile.

"Well, I've got work for you," continued Mr. Carleton; "or, rather, the Lord has work for you at Wenton."

"What is it, sir?" Ray asked, with some idea now of what the matter to be "talked over" was.

"You know," explained Mr. Carleton, "that I have, since the organization of the church there, been the acting pastor. I have gone down to them at least once in two months, have secured them occasional supplies, and baptized the new members; but I cannot with my work here do the work that ought to be done down there. In consultation with Mr. Bacon, your brother George, and Sailor Jack, all of whom have a deep interest in the little church there, I find we have but one opinion. It is that I should still keep the oversight of the church, but that I should be provided with an assistant. I have named you as the one whom I prefer for that position, and the officers of the Wenton Church have approved my choice.

"The plan I have in view is this: You are to go there and preach to that people at least once each week, and conduct such other services as in your judgment are for the best interest of the field. You will do such pastoral work as seems to you will be the most efficacious in the reaching of that people. At times when an ordained minister is needed there, you will simply change with me for the day. If the plan proves successful, this will be

your work throughout your college course, as you can readily come down from the city Saturday afternoons and return Monday mornings in time for your studies. Whenever the work is too hard for you, we will lighten it so you need in no way neglect your college duties. A compensation sufficient to meet all of your actual wants will be paid by the church, and it seems to me there are two marked advantages from the plan: the church will have fuller services than it can secure in any other way until it becomes strong enough for a settled pastor, and you, on the other hand, under my direction and with my help, will be gaining an experience that will be invaluable in your life work. Were you younger, I should have hesitated to suggest such a plan to you, but with your age, and an unusual maturity even for your years, I can see no harm to yourself in this undertaking, while there will evidently be much that will be advantageous. Should you need a little time to think this over, it will be given you; but doubtless you can even now tell how the plan impresses you."

"I am ready to do any work for my Master," Ray replied. "It may be poorly and feebly done; but it shall be the *best* I can do. Any time in the judgment of yourself and the Wenton people it would be wiser for you to have some other assistant, I will lay down the work. When shall I begin?"

"This coming Sunday, if you can get ready for it,"

answered Mr. Carleton ; “ and now let us ask the Lord to bless our arrangement.”

The two knelt there and prayed together with an earnestness and faith, which can only come from hearts fully consecrated to the Lord, and that desire to know and do his will.

“ I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,” Ray solemnly affirmed, in inspired words, as he laid his hand in his pastor’s for a moment before going.

“ Amen,” heartily assented Mr. Carleton, warmly shaking the proffered hand, and adding, as a parting benediction : “ He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.”

Ray entered into his appointed work with a joy such as he had never known before. It seemed a little nearer the goal for which he was striving than anything he had yet undertaken. He prepared himself as carefully as possible for his pulpit ministrations, and then left his notes behind and talked to his hearers as the Spirit gave him utterance. His messages came warm from the heart, and they went to the heart. The little church took on new life. Its members were aroused to activity. The unsaved were visited and prayed with. The result proved that the Spirit could work upon the hearts of men even in the summer months, and during the vacation season. Many came inquiring the way of salvation ; nor did they inquire in vain. Early in August Mr. Carleton

came down, and spent a Sunday at Wenton, and baptized a score of believers, while Ray went up to Afton to supply the pulpit of the First Church.

He had many misgivings as to his fitness, and acceptableness to his hearers ; but when Mr. Carleton arranged the exchange, he did not make a single objection. It was a part of his work, and he accepted it with the determination to do the best he could. Mrs. Carleton was out of town, and the parsonage was closed ; so he went to his Afton home at the Lawton Cottage for entertainment over Sunday.

“ I tell you, Ned,” he said to Edward, when they went to their room that night. “ I have the biggest undertaking on my hands for to-morrow I ever had, but I shall not shrink from it. What I dread most, however, is that some may remember their old prejudices of four or five years ago, and refuse to listen to the message I bring.”

“ I do not believe there is any of that old and foolish prejudice left in the whole town,” Edward answered. “ Mr. Carleton told me that he had not arranged this plan of work for you without consulting the officers of the church, and that the proposition had first come from them to have you come here when he might be away. I believe you will have a full house to-morrow, and that they will listen to you with even a deeper interest than they would to an entire stranger.”

The morrow proved Edward right, so far as outward appearances could indicate the hearts of the people. They filled the whole house, and gave Ray the most courteous and marked attention, both morning and evening.

He chose for his text in the morning the words found in John 11 : 6 : " When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was." Why God delays in answering our requests was his theme; and he suggested three reasons, each of which found its illustration in the experience of those sisters of Bethany. With a wealth of illustration from the history and experience of God's people that was hardly to be expected from so young a preacher, he developed his theme, speaking also with a simplicity and earnestness that held the undivided attention of his hearers to the close.

But it was the evening discourse that made the strongest impression upon the First Church people. An audience larger if anything than that of the morning had gathered. Ray's text was from John 13 : 8 : " If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me," and his theme was : " Christ a necessity of humanity." Its need of cleansing, its inability to cleanse itself, and therefore the absolute necessity of its resorting to Jesus Christ, " who taketh away the sin of the world," were the three points he presented with real earnestness, freshness, and power.

Ray came down from the pulpit to receive the hearty commendations of many who, previous to this, had never been especially demonstrative toward him. Slowly he made his way to the vestibule to find a number of his old school friends waiting to speak with him. He delayed a few minutes to return their greetings; then he said to Daisy Lawton, who was among them: "Miss Daisy, shall we go now?" She at once took his arm, and they entered the street. His act gave occasion for many significant looks and remarks from those who had witnessed it. "I wonder if they are engaged?" "What a handsome couple?" "And so suited to each other!" passed from lip to lip. Meantime, he and Daisy, utterly unconscious of the train of remarks they had set in motion, were going slowly up the avenue toward the cottage. She was telling him how she had enjoyed *that* sermon, and with the familiarity of an old friend was suggesting here and there an improvement in the thought and utterance of the young preacher. As he listened to her, there suddenly came over him the consciousness that not only his happiness, but his greatest usefulness depended largely upon that fair girl's walking by his side through life. They had now reached the cottage porch, and turned for a moment to look off toward the hills rising quite abruptly just back of them. Then a sudden resolve came to Ray. He would settle this important question before he returned to Wenton on the morrow.

"Daisy," he said, "I have not been upon the hills for several years, and to-morrow, before I return to Wenton, I believe I will go up there. Could you arrange to go with me?"

Was there something in his tones that revealed the purpose hidden in his heart? Or had that address, "Daisy," instead of "Miss Daisy," as he had always addressed her before, suggested to the young girl why it was he asked this favor? They are wrong who say, "Love is always blind." Love is sometimes keen-eyed, and detects readily what other eyes have not begun to discern. It was so now. A great hope came to that young girl at his words, simple as they were. Her heart was thrilled with a joy that no words could express, and a great light came into the eyes that looked up into his, as she answered, so tremulously as not to escape his notice: "Certainly, Ray, if you wish it." And then she turned, and quickly fled into the cottage.

As early the next morning as the walking through the fields would permit—for there had been a heavy dew—Ray and Daisy started up the hillside. It was a long and fatiguing tramp, but Ray helped his companion over the more difficult places; and not far from an hour after they started, they reached the plateau near the top of the hill overlooking the town and the bay. They rested a few minutes here, and then, at Ray's suggestion, passed around the edge of the hill until they reached a

large, shelving rock, from which they could see not only the village and the water, but the site of the Black Forge Mills. Here they sat down, and gazed about them for a time in silence. There were the ruins, about to rise, phoenix like, from their ashes; for the smelting company had already purchased the property. Yonder, in the distance, was Long Point farm, where Ray had spent so many happy hours, and where he had begun his upward course toward an education and his life work. Right at their feet, seemingly, was the First Church, where he had first confessed Jesus, and where he had preached the day before.

“Who would believe,” he said, breaking the long silence, “that six years ago I was at work in the mills at the Forge—a wild, reckless, godless boy. Did Mr. Carleton ever tell you how I stoned him the first time he visited the mills?”

“He didn’t,” Daisy answered, with a quick laugh; “but Edward has. Doesn’t it seem funny now?”

“Yes, it does now to laugh over it; and I’m not sure but that was my very first step toward my present life, strange as it may seem. Do you know I have not been up here since I went down to Long Point farm yonder to work? Can it be possible that it is five years ago?”

“And yesterday you preached very acceptably for the First Church people,” added Daisy, gleefully. “Ray Branford, the stone-throwing rascal, has in a little over



Black Forge Mills.



six years become Mr. Ray Branford, the preacher. What a cause for wonder ! ”

“Behold what God has wrought,” said Ray, gratefully. Then he turned and took the little hand of that fair young girl in his. “Daisy,” he went on, vehemently, “my whole life is known to you. Nothing is hid. What I was, you know ; what I am, and what I hope to be by God’s grace, you also know. One thing only have I kept from you. So long have I loved you I can hardly tell when that love began. Perhaps it was when you stood on the wharf and called me back to give me those skates. Again and again have I been on the point of declaring my love. I can refrain no longer. I know my happiness and my usefulness depends largely upon—yea, *wholly* upon your walking through life by my side as my wife. Tell me, darling, is my love returned ? ”

As he began, those bright eyes had drooped, a quick flush had swept over her face, and the little hand he held trembled in his grasp. As he closed, her head dropped upon his shoulder, and she burst into tears ; but they were tears of joy.

“What is it, Daisy ? ” he asked, anxiously, throwing his strong arm around her, and drawing her a little closer to him, “do you not love me ? ”

“Oh, Ray,” she exclaimed, smiling through her tears, “I have loved you so very, very long, and I have been afraid you did not love me as I loved you. I knew you

cared for me as you might for a sister, but I knew I loved you more than all others beside. Not until last night did I feel sure you loved me as you do, and I thought you would speak to me to-day of this. I cannot tell you how unworthy I feel to help you in your life work; but truly, darling, I will be the best little wife and helpmeet for you that I, with God's help, can be."

For answer, he pressed the first kiss he had ever given her upon her lips; and then he said, gently: "Shall we not ask Jesus to bless us in our love, and to grant us many years together in his work, Daisy?" Then they knelt while Ray prayed with a fervor and faith he had never manifested before, after which they slowly started down the hillside on their return to the village.

They immediately sought Mrs. Lawton, and with his arm thrown around the blushing girl, Ray manfully told his story, and asked for the mother's sanction and blessing.

"Just as if I hadn't seen this and expected it for years," she answered, as she kissed them both. "It is, I believe, of the Lord, and why should I say it nay." And she wisely rose and left the lovers together. Edward found them in the parlor a little later; and evidently his mother had told him something of the condition of things, for he walked directly over to the loving pair, and kissing Daisy, he took Ray by the hand. "My more than brother," he said, "there is nothing I would withhold from you. Nor do I know of any one more worthy of

the dearest sister on earth. God bless you both." And he, too, left them alone.

Ray took an afternoon train for Wenton because his work called him, rather than because he desired to go. Both Edward and Daisy had accompanied him to the depot, and as he bade them good-bye and took his seat in the cars, he felt there was nothing now to mar his happiness or lessen his usefulness. But in spite of himself the divine words would come to his mind with a persistency that was almost startling: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### LIFE'S WORK BEGUN.

FOUR years in college and three years in the seminary—seven years in all—was a long period of time to wait before entering on one's life work Ray thought, as he and Edward Lawton one bright September morning left Afton for the large and busy city where was the university they were to attend. But with hearts and minds and hands fully occupied, even those years ran quickly by, and one spring day Ray awoke to the consciousness that his school days were nearly over.

There had been on his part the same faithful work, the same thorough devotion to Christ, the same desire to do all that he did to the glory of God; and these traits had made him through all those years the same successful student and the same earnest Christian worker that he had been while in Clinton Academy. He had graduated from the college with its highest rank, and then he and Edward for the first time took different courses of study. Edward had decided on the medical profession, while Ray, still carrying out the cherished hope of his heart, had entered the Theological Seminary. Fortunately for the two friends, both of these departments were to be

found in the city where they had taken their collegiate course, and by securing private apartments they were still enabled to room together, as they had done for the eight previous years.

Ray had continued his religious work at Wenton throughout his college course, but on entering the seminary he gave this up for two reasons: The little church there had so grown under his ministrations that it was able to give a settled pastor a comfortable support; then, too, Ray had been invited to take charge of a new interest established in a growing part of the large city where he was studying. Taking, therefore, a thorough rest during the vacation between his college and seminary courses, Ray threw himself on the opening of the fall term into this new field with characteristic energy, and as the work was right at hand, and could have his constant oversight, it was soon apparent that at no distant day there would be developed there a strong, self-sustaining church.

Twice during these years of study and toil was Ray suddenly called back to Afton. The first occasion was during his second year at the college, and was no less an important event than the marriage of Captain Thomas S. Branford, of the steamship *Illyria*, plying between New York and Liverpool, to Miss Ettie Squire, only daughter of General Burton Squire, of Afton. The marriage service was performed by Rev. Mr. Carleton, at the First Church, after which a brilliant reception was given at

the Squire mansion. The bride looked lovely, as brides always do, while few grooms look prouder or handsomer or more manly than did Captain Tom. There were some gossips in the town who were foolish enough to remark: "They could not see what Ettie Squire or her rich and proud father could be thinking of, for once Tom Branford, even if he was a captain now, had been in jail." But this remark being repeated in the hearing of Mrs. Carleton, she in her own quiet, womanly way turned upon the speaker with the question: "Which is better, to marry a man with as marked a Christian character as Captain Branford has for years sustained, even if in his earlier days, and owing to his unfortunate home-training, he did that which was wrong, or to marry a man who has no Christian character, who openly avows his unbelief in all holy things, and has nothing to his credit but a family name and great wealth, the one of which he is liable to disgrace, and the other to lose at any hour?" As the speaker was to marry a man of the latter character at an early day, the question was unanswered; but the gossiping tongue was for the time completely silenced.

The other occasion that called Ray suddenly back to Afton occurred just after his first year in the seminary had begun, and was one that brought sorrow to his own as well as to other hearts. It was the death of Mr. Jacob Woodhull. He had come up to the Friday evening service at the First Church as usual, and had taken part in

the meeting with more than usual fervor. As he arose to leave the chapel, at the close of the service, he suddenly fell forward on the floor. Dr. Gasque was not over ten feet away, but when he bent over the fallen man he had already expired.

It was known that the kind but eccentric old man was comparatively well off, but no one was prepared for the astonishing fact that his property amounted to several hundred thousand dollars. Papers were found also that showed that he for years had been a most liberal supporter of the various departments of Christian work at home and abroad. He left a will, moreover, which bequeathed all his property to benevolent institutions and causes with two comparatively small exceptions. He gave his nephew George Woodhull twenty-five thousand dollars in trust, the income to be used during his life as he saw fit, the principal on his death to be divided among his children. The other bequest was of ten thousand dollars, and was given directly to Ray Branford, "being," as the will stated, "the amount due him in return for money loaned me, the said Jacob Woodhull, some years ago; and the only stipulation I make is, that he, the said Branford, use it in such a way as to promote his highest usefulness as a worker for Christ."

Daisy Lawton, on graduating from the young ladies' institute she was attending, one year after Ray had entered college, at once made arrangements to enter a

young ladies' college, not far from the city where Ray and Edward were studying. In every way possible she strove to keep pace with Ray in his mental and spiritual growth, that she might in the fullest sense be qualified to walk by his side as a true helper. They frequently saw each other; their vacations were spent together; when separated, they kept up a constant correspondence. Thus they found themselves not only united in heart, but also bound together by common thoughts, by similar desires, and by the same holy purpose to make their lives glorify the same Master and Lord. When she graduated from college, she accepted a position as teacher in the Afton Graded School; but knowing that Ray would, in his chosen profession, never have an over-abundance of this world's goods, she, under her mother's supervision, took pains to carefully qualify herself as a thorough housekeeper. No household duty was regarded by her as too insignificant to know how to do with her own hands, or to know how to do well. Ray, as he watched her development, and saw how conscientiously she strove, in her great love for him, to make herself qualified for every duty that would come to her as his wife, realized more and more how utterly impossible it was for him to get along without her, and thanked God more and more for the treasure he had bestowed. Unconsciously to himself, she was absorbing the great love of his heart—the one who was most in his thoughts, and the one for whom he

most planned and worked. He loved Jesus; he wanted to do Jesus' work; he would not have been happy in any other service; yet not Jesus, but Daisy, was fast becoming the idol of his soul. But God knew it; and, bending in pitying love over him, was already planning to teach him the great and eternal truth: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God; and him only shalt thou serve."

Strange as it may seem, Ray had nearly completed his seminary course, and as yet had come to no full decision as to what specific branch of religious work he should follow. He was thoroughly interested in both home and foreign missions, and had for years kept himself well informed as to the methods and the success of the work in both departments. While at Wenton, he had taken care to ground the little church, from the very outset, in its duty not only to care for itself, but to contribute toward sending the gospel to the destitute regions at home and abroad. "I regret," he frequently said, "that we have gotten into the habit of speaking of home and foreign missions, as though there were a difference between them, and that one is nearer, and therefore has a greater claim upon us than the other. To my mind, all is Christ's work; all is a part of his great commission. That old heathen motto, 'Nothing pertaining to humanity do I deem foreign,' in its widest and fullest sense should be the sentiment of every church of Christ, and of every Christian heart.

Wherever there is a human soul without Jesus, there the gospel should be sent; there some preacher should go. Not because it is at home or abroad; but because it is Christ's command, and because it is a human soul needing his salvation."

As he drew near the close of his seminary course, however, he had felt a yearning toward the work abroad. "There is the most need of preachers there. I believe I would love to go where no preacher has yet gone; where it is darkest, and they most need the light. I only await the will of God," he one day said, little knowing that God, that very day, was to show him his will.

He left his room to go over to the chapel where he was preaching, and where that evening he was to hold a prayer meeting. It was yet early, but he had a call or two to make, and was to take tea with one of the families attending the chapel. As he passed down one of the business streets of the city, he came to a place where a large stone building was being erected. The walls were already half up, and a huge stone was even then being hoisted up to its position on the wall. He paused a moment, with several others, to see the workmen skillfully swing the heavy stone into place. Soon it had reached the proper height, and was slowly turning around to fit the niche it was designed to fill. But before it was fairly secured in its place, through the carelessness of one of the workmen, it slipped, and then with terrible impetus came plunging

down upon the men at the derrick. With a cry of alarm, they dropped the cranks and fled from under. All escaped but one—a foreigner who had landed but a few days before, and who had that day, for the first time, found employment. One corner of the descending stone, as it swung around, struck him upon the temple, and he was instantly killed.

Ray helped to place the man in the ambulance, and saw him removed to the morgue. Then he went on toward the part of the city he was seeking. But the face of the dead man haunted him. It kept rising up before him in the prayer room. He had never so felt the uncertainty of life. He had never been so strongly impressed with the need of an immediate reconciliation to God on the part of every soul. Never before had he so realized how fearful it must be for one to die unsaved. He went back to his room. Edward was already in bed and asleep; but he could not retire. Slowly he paced his room. He had learned enough about the unfortunate man to know he had left a wife and several children at home, to seek work in a strange land; that he had doubtless perished without one ray of hope. Was not this the very way in which hundreds and thousands on foreign fields were perishing where one so perished in America? Hundreds at home were warning souls of their danger, and pointing out to them the way of eternal life: but in how many places, and among how many people, was there not a

single witness for Christ; not a single preacher of his salvation! Had he any right to delay in hastening on to this work? Hour after hour Ray walked that room, weighing that question as he had never weighed it before. The more he thought it over, the clearer his duty became; and just as it began to grow light he threw himself on his knees at his bedside. "O Christ, I accept thy call," he cried. "Open thou the field, and I promise thee I will go. And may thy presence go with me, and make me a true witness of thy salvation unto perishing souls." He then sought his bed for a brief rest before the duties of the day began.

He waited several days before he wrote to Daisy of his decision, for he wanted to be sure he had not mistaken the will of God. Finding that each day only confirmed him in his choice, he then wrote her a full account of his decision, and how he had been led to make it. With great anxiety, he awaited her reply. It came almost immediately, and was as follows:

AFTON, April 10, 18—.

DEAR RAY:

Your letter was received last evening. I was not surprised at its contents, nor was I wholly unprepared for it, for I have been praying that this might be your choice. I know I shall love the work among those who so greatly need it, and I have long felt that there we can do our best work for Jesus. Unworthy as I am, I will gladly take my place by your side and do all I can to prosper you in your chosen field. I love home and friends, but I love Christ and those darkened, perishing souls more. I have

told mamma, and she says I am to tell you that, hard as it is, she too can make the sacrifice for Jesus' sake. Let us pray that Christ will make us wholly consecrated to this our life work.

In deepest love, your

DAISY.

Ray read this letter over a dozen times. He had anxiously awaited it, fearing Daisy might shrink from the work he had chosen; instead, she assured him she had been praying it might be his choice. Even Mrs. Lawton had declared she too could make the sacrifice it involved for Christ's sake. Was ever duty plainer; or could the obstacles that appeared to be in the way be more thoroughly removed?

"When they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away—for it was very great," he murmured. "There is nothing now in the way of our honoring Jesus. May the honor we bestow be worthy not of a dead, but a risen Lord."

He now wrote to the Executive Board of Foreign Missions, offering himself for any old field where they might need a laborer, or any new field they might feel called to open. "My choice would be," he wrote, "to go where the gospel is most needed, and the young lady who will go with me as my wife has the same desire. I can be ready to go out the coming fall, or sooner, if you prefer."

Before the close of the seminary term he received the answer of the board. It gratefully accepted his offer, and named him for a field where work had long been

begun, but with little result, and where a teeming population of millions was crying out for the Bread of Life.

“I will now write Daisy,” he said, on reading the letter, “to prepare herself for our immediate marriage. Together we will study the language of this people, and in October sail for our designated field for hard, but I trust, fruitful toil. Thank God, our life’s work is found at last.”

But he never wrote that letter. Two hours later Edward entered the room hastily, bearing the following telegram :

Edward and Ray come at once. Mother is very ill.

DAISY.

With little knowledge of the dark shadow falling over him, or of the great struggle for God and for duty that was before him, Ray, with Edward, took that night’s express for Afton.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### RAY'S FULL SURRENDER.

THE train arrived at Afton a little past midnight, and Ray and Edward found Dr. Gasque at the station with his carriage waiting for them. To their anxious inquiry as to Mrs. Lawton's condition, the doctor briefly replied :

“She had a paralytic stroke this afternoon, and is still lying in an unconscious condition. We cannot yet tell the result, but we fear the worst. Dr. Platt is in consultation with me, and is now in charge of the patient.”

When they reached the house, Daisy could tell but little more. She and her mother had been out calling that afternoon after school was out ; on their return home the mother had gone to her own room apparently as well as usual. A moment later Daisy heard a heavy fall, and hastening to the chamber, found her mother unconscious upon the floor. Calling the house girl, they had raised the unconscious form and placed her upon the bed, and immediately sent for Dr. Gasque. He had called in Dr. Platt, and one or both physicians had been there ever since, but as yet no change in the mother's condition was perceptible.

Slowly the hours passed. Dr. Gasque called Edward in to assist Dr. Platt and himself, and with powerful batteries they tried to arouse the feeble vitality of their patient, while Ray and Daisy remained within easy call, anxiously waiting for the slightest evidence that the mother was really better. When morning came, Mrs. Lawton had regained consciousness, but was unable to speak, or to move hand or foot. Then began a vigil, not of hours or days, but of weeks. Daisy procured a substitute for the rest of the school term, and took charge of the household; a trained and skillful nurse was secured for Mrs. Lawton; Edward and Ray returned to the city for the closing exercises of the medical college and seminary, and then hastened back to Afton. Ray now ventured to speak to Daisy of the decision of the mission board, and the field to which they had been assigned.

"This sudden illness of your mother," he continued, "will, I know, change our plans. But what shall we do, Daisy darling?"

The face that looked up into his was deathly pale; marks of intense anguish were there; and she could scarcely control her voice, as she replied:

"You will have to go alone, Ray. The doctors say mother can never be any better, but she may live in this condition for years. My duty, then, is clear. I must remain here by mother's side until all is over. I cannot tell you, nor can you ever know what this decision has

cost me. To give you up, Ray; to feel that thousands of miles separate us; to know that you may be sick, or may even die there, and I cannot be with you! Oh, my Saviour, how can I, how can I!" And she threw herself in a paroxysm of grief upon his breast. Gently he stroked the waving tresses until she grew calmer.

"Can it be," he then asked, with a troubled face, "that I have made a mistake in thinking we were called to this work when it was not God's will? Does he mean by this providence to show us that we are to remain at home, and toil here for him? I can readily find a field of labor, and we can be married; your mother can be moved to our home, and still we can walk side by side in the Master's work."

"Oh, Ray!" she exclaimed, almost in alarm, "I have already battled with that temptation, and won the victory. Don't bring it up again, or persuade yourself it is God's will. You have not mistaken your life's work. Those heathen lands are calling you. God is saying in tones you cannot mistake, 'Obey the call.' I know it. Why he should have prevented me from going with you, I cannot tell. It may be I am not fitted for the work. It may be we loved each other too well, and he wants to teach us to love him first and most of all. I do not question his wisdom. I cannot understand, but I trust him. Don't think my love for you has in any wise diminished. Never were you so dear to me. Death

would be a trifle beside this living separation from you; but he has made this duty, and for his sake I can drink the cup. 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.'" A look of calm resignation had settled on her face; you could see she suffered, yet her heart was at peace; for when the human will has lost itself in the divine will, the soul is always at rest.

"You are braver than I," murmured Ray, kissing her passionately, and then he hastened from the room.

Putting on his hat, he started off at a brisk walk for the hills. He felt he must have air and space for this great struggle with himself. His struggle was not over his going to the foreign field. He admitted that was duty; but might he not put off that going for a year, and then Daisy might be able to go with him? This seemed plausible, for it coincided with his own wishes. Might not God have purposely delayed their going so that they would have more time to study the language of the people to whom they were assigned? Why had he not thought of this before? The more he dwelt upon it, and weighed the reasons for such a delay, the more convinced he was that he had now solved the great purpose of God's unexpected providence. He felt sure of it when, after a long tramp, he came around by the office for his mail. A letter was there from Mr. Grafton, of Easton, asking him to supply, for a Sunday or two, the church which he had been accustomed to attend

during his academic days. This church had had a marvelous growth during the years he had been away from there. A large and beautiful house of worship, a vigorous church membership, and an ample salary, were the inducements it offered to the coming pastor; and Mr. Grafton had added: "I am instructed by our church committee to say that if you, on visiting us, should care to enter into a permanent relation with us, such a course will be most satisfactory to the church." Ray read the letter through, and then hastened back to the cottage. Finding Daisy, he poured forth in glowing language his convictions, and, reading the letter to her, he asked:

"Was ever anything plainer? Here, without the asking, has God appointed my work; you can now become my wife, and together we will toil at Easton, until God opens the way for our going to the foreign field."

A great hope, for a moment, came into her pale, anxious face; then she said, quietly: "We will pray over it, Ray, and if it truly seems to be God's will, I shall be only too happy to grant your request." And she hid her blushing face on his shoulder.

"We will pray over it, Ray." Those words came with a condemning force to his ears. In all his weighing of the question, he had not prayed over it. He had not even thought of it; and now, as he realized this, and that he had not followed his usual custom of taking all

of his plans to God for his direction, he was startled. Was he really setting up his own will, and trying to make God's will conform to it, instead of asking what was God's will, and then yielding his own will to that?

"You are right, my Daisy," he said, raising her blushing face up to his for a kiss. "I am afraid I have not tried to settle this question as I should have done; we will indeed pray over it. Meantime, I can see no harm in going up to Easton and preaching for that church on Sunday. In that way God may give us light on this important question."

But when he got to Easton and found how anxious the Grand Avenue Church people were to have him for their pastor, and how sure they were it would not be right for him to sail to his mission field without a wife, he yielded; and before he returned to Afton he had written the mission board that he would postpone his going out for a year, and had closed an engagement with the church as its pastor for the same length of time.

When he told Daisy, she gravely shook her head. "I'm afraid, Ray, you have made a mistake," she said; "but, of course, in such a question as this, the final decision must always rest with you. It will take me some time to get ready for our marriage, with my other duties; then, too, we must see if mother can safely be moved as far as Easton. There is another thing we should think of also. If we are married, and then I could not go

out with you in a year, what will you do? It will be infinitely harder for us to separate then: perhaps you would have to give up your plan altogether. Would it not be better to wait, and leave yourself at liberty to go alone another year, if my duty keeps me here? Don't think I am hesitating on my own account, Ray, about being your wife," she added, noticing his annoyed look. "It is because I love you so that I want in no way to embarrass you in your chosen work. Look well at every side of this question, and if you still feel it is the wisest course to take, I shall not delay our marriage a moment."

Throwing his arm around her, Ray drew her down beside him on the nearest sofa.

"Go on, as your other duties may permit, my darling, in your preparations for our marriage," he gravely said; "and the first moment it seems wisest to have the ceremony performed, we will have it done. It may come soon, and at brief notice; it may be long in the coming: but we will be ready for it at any hour.

"Meantime, I confess I shall find satisfaction in the fact that you are not far away, and we can see each other often," she responded, smilingly.

Ray believed that he was thoroughly consecrated to his work at Easton. He certainly never worked harder, nor prayed more fervently for God's blessing on his labors; but month after month passed, and not the slightest fruit appeared. Ray grew discouraged. He

began to feel he had made a mistake in accepting his pastorate. Had he not, indeed, made his first mistake in not going to the foreign field? Had not his course been based upon a doubt of God? If he had only trusted God and gone forward, might not God have made it perfectly possible for Daisy to have gone with him? Had he not put Daisy first and God second? and was not his toil fruitless because God would not consent to any such arrangement? He opened his Bible and read the story of Jonah. "He was troubled until he went back to his duty, and took up his appointed work." He commented: "Shall it be so with me?" As if in answer to his question the door bell rang sharply. A moment later a telegram was handed into his study. With trembling hand he tore open the envelope. It grew so dark around him he could scarcely read the single line written on the enclosed page:

Come at once. Daisy is sick—perhaps dying.

EDWARD.

A train left in fifteen minutes. Mechanically he made his preparations, was driven to the station, and swung on to the last car of the already moving train. How slowly it went!—would Daisy be living when he arrived?

"Oh, God! not this blow—not this blow!" he repeated over and over again.

"Afton!" finally the brakeman called.

He arose as one in a dream and staggered out to the platform. Harry Gasque met him. Neither Edward

nor Dr. Gasque had come—was this a harbinger of evil or good?

“Harry,” he gasped, “is she living?” He did not know his own voice, it was so unnatural in its huskiness.

“Yes,” Harry answered, as he helped Ray into the waiting carriage. “Father and Edward and Dr. Platt and Dr. Blanding of this city, are in consultation now, so I came for you.”

The great Dr. Blanding had been summoned then. The case must be critical. Yet only three days before he had heard from Daisy, and she was well.

“What is the disease?” he steadied his voice to ask.

“Typhoid pneumonia,” his companion briefly answered.

They reached the house. Edward met him at the door.

“Calm yourself, Ray,” he said, soothingly. “She is calling piteously for you, and for her sake you must be calm.”

“For her sake!” Edward could not have used wiser words. By a mighty effort Ray gained control of himself. He was very pale, but outwardly calm, as he entered the sick room. He bent over the sufferer, fair and beautiful even in her delirium, and never so inexpressibly dear to him as now.

“Daisy, I have come,” he said, gently.

“I am so glad,” she answered, with a deep sigh, and dropped off into a quiet slumber.

Hour after hour Ray sat there, and day after day. At times Daisy was herself, and conversed understandingly with him. At other times she was in a wild delirium, and talked incessantly of what she called Ray's mistake, and now God would bless him no more. She would plead with him to be true to duty; again she would beg him piteously not to leave her.

From the outset the doctors had given but little hopes of her recovery. Every effort to reduce the extreme temperature had been unavailing, and each day she grew weaker. One Sunday morning she came out from a prolonged stupor very feeble, but perfectly rational. She smiled at Ray, and said, with deep pathos that brought tears to his eyes:

"Poor boy! you are having a long and weary watch; but it will soon be over. I have loved you so, and have been so anxious to work by your side. But not my will, but his will, be done! Promise me, Ray, you will take up your chosen work when I am gone, and carry it on faithfully to life's end. If Jesus is willing, I shall be near you, after all. Better this than a living separation."

He controlled himself as best he could, and gave her the desired promise; and when, a few moments later, she sank into a stupor again, he left her in Edward's care, and went across the hall to his own room.

Kneeling by the bedside, he began a prayer of most humble confession. He acknowledged his mistake. He

admitted that Daisy had been the idol of his soul, and that in his plans and in his work he had thought first of her.

“O Lord,” he cried, “it is not necessary that thou shouldst remove her, for me to know and do my duty. Thy will is above my will. I surrender all, even her, to thee. Forgive my sin. Restore to me thy favor and thy power. I will obey thy call. Nay, Lord, her life and her death are in thy hands. What is for thy glory, that wilt thou do.”

Over and over he prayed. Hour after hour passed. Not until he felt a peace he long had not known; not until the assurance had come to him that Daisy would be spared, did he arise from his knees.

It was night when he again sought Daisy’s room. Dr. Gasque and Edward looked up at him in astonishment as he entered, for his hair was sprinkled with gray, and he looked ten years older than when he left the room only a few hours before.

“How is she, Dr. Gasque?” he asked, with a smile, the first they had seen upon his lips since his arrival.

“Her temperature has gone down two degrees, and she rests quietly,” he replied. “Really, if it were possible, I should think she was better.”

“She will live. God has promised it,” Ray responded, with the old confident, positive tone he was accustomed to use in religious things.

Again the two watchers by the bedside looked at him;

and Ray, utterly unaware of the change in his appearance, gave them an assuring smile.

"I have seen God face to face," he said, with tones of awe, "and yet I have lived. Praise his holy name."

"If she lives," responded Dr. Gasque, reverently, "I shall have no hesitancy in declaring that 'the prayer of faith shall save the sick.'"

All night those three watched by the fair sufferer's side. At dawn she awoke.

"Dr. Gasque, Edward, and Ray—all here by me," she said, feebly. Then to Ray: "Darling, I have had such a sweet dream; Jesus came himself to me, and said: 'It is enough; thou shalt live'; and really I feel stronger and better. I know you have prayed for me, and God has heard your prayer."

Dr. Gasque had been feeling her pulse, and now passed his hand over her brow. "Be perfectly quiet, Miss Daisy," he said; "you are better." To Edward and Ray he added, as they followed him into the hall way, "She will live."

Edward with a light heart returned to the sick chamber, but Ray crossed the hall and entered his room. Throwing himself on his bed for a much-needed rest, he repeated over and over, in tones of deepest gratitude and love, "O God, thy will shall be done. Thy will shall be done."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### HOPE'S FULL FRUITION AT LAST.

**D**AISY'S convalescence was slow but sure. In a week she was regarded as out of danger, and Ray returned to his work at Easton. He at once wrote the mission board, informing them of his readiness to go at brief notice to any field the mission might suggest, though he should have to go alone. They immediately responded that no one had as yet been assigned to the vacancy he had expected to fill the October before, and in their judgment he was peculiarly qualified for that field; therefore they would suggest that he make every preparation to go out to that people the coming October, and possibly circumstances would be such at that time he could take a wife with him. No time need actually be wasted during the few months of waiting, as in a town not over twenty miles from him was a returned missionary familiar with the language and customs of the people among whom he would work. By visiting him, Ray could obtain such information and help as would enable him to make a most profitable use of the intervening months. Acting upon this suggestion, Ray, at as early a date as

possible, called on the missionary, and under his instruction began the study of the language.

A week or two later he went down to Afton to spend a day with Daisy. She was able to occupy an invalid's chair, and had regained much of her old cheerfulness and vivacity. As he sat by her, he told her of the struggle through which he had passed when her condition had been most critical, and of the pledge he had then made to God.

"Hard as it is, my darling," he said, "to fulfill that pledge, I must do it. I dare not do otherwise. In fact, lest I should waver again in my resolve, I immediately wrote the mission board, and am now appointed to my old field, to sail the coming October. I have placed myself under the instruction of a returned missionary, and shall prepare myself, as far as possible, during the intervening months for my life work. I know that you, painful as our separation will be, will nevertheless approve of my decision. As you once said, I by God's grace can now say, 'Though I cannot understand, yet I can trust him.'"

The fair face was perhaps a trifle paler, but the voice that answered him was perfectly steady and almost triumphant in its tones: "It is all right, Ray. I knew of your struggle. These locks"—and she lightly brushed his hair—"have told the story of your anguish; but threaded as they are with gray they are infinitely more

precious to me, for they tell of a victory won over self. Let me tell you too, Ray darling, I do not believe God has raised me from that sick bed for nothing. You may have to go out alone and for a time we may be separated. But I believe the Saviour has called me to that work, and sooner or later I shall toil by your side. It may seem unmaidenly, but I promise you that when duty at home is over, I shall hasten across the seas to you, and our union and our toil will perhaps be worth all the more because we have made even this our sacrifice for Jesus' sake."

"God bless you for those words, darling; they have given me a hope that will brighten my toil and make me more willing to undergo the sacrifice," he replied. And, rising, he bent down over her fair face and pressed kiss after kiss upon her lips.

"There, that will do, sir," she at length cried, with something of her old mirth, and struggling for breath; "nothing but the fact that you are so soon to leave me reconciles me to such prodigality on your part." Then, with tears coming into her eyes, "You will be with me as often as possible, Ray? Our long separation will come quickly, and I am selfish enough to want you with me every moment you can spare until then."

"I will come down as often as possible until September," he answered. "Then I will come here, and remain until the hour of my departure is at hand."

He went back to Easton the next morning happier, notwithstanding the approaching separation from Daisy, than he had been for months. He was in the line of duty again, and once more he was conscious of the Spirit's presence and power.

It was a Saturday, and on his arrival at Easton a press of work was upon him until a late hour that night. Quite exhausted, not far from midnight he threw himself upon his bed, and soon fell asleep. Philosophers tell us that our dreams are a continuation of our waking thoughts. Be this as it may, Ray soon had a vision or dream quite in keeping with his thoughts and feelings of the whole day before. He felt himself suddenly surrounded by an intense glory; an inexpressible happiness filled his soul; the brightness grew so vivid he could not keep his eyes open. But a moment later he felt a hand laid upon his head, and a voice, loving and tender, said: "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good word and work." Thrice did the voice utter these words; and then the hand was removed, the brightness gradually faded away, but the happiness remained. It was a joy unlike any Ray had experienced before—deeper, richer, holier far. He felt that he had been baptized anew with the Holy Ghost.

He went to his pulpit the following morning with the power of that divine touch and commendation upon him.

He preached with a freshness and vigor that moved the great audience before him; in the evening prayer meeting, souls inquired the way to Jesus. With the suddenness of a meteor's glare the power of the Spirit burst in mighty revival upon that church and congregation. For ten weeks Ray stood nightly in his pulpit and proclaimed the word of life; hundreds inquired: "What shall I do to be saved?" Then, from sheer exhaustion, Ray stopped. His church officers called on him, and said:

"Pastor, go off and rest. Stay one week or more, as you please. We will do what we can to continue these services; but you have earned, nay, your physical condition demands, absolute rest."

The next train took Ray to Afton. There was no place where he could rest as he could in the Lawton cottage. His extra labor had kept him too from Daisy; and he felt he now had earned the right to spend a few days by her side. He had not realized how exhausted he was until he got out at the Afton station, and started to walk up the avenue. From sheer weakness he was forced to call a carriage, and be driven around to the cottage door. It was now the middle of May, and the day was bright and sunny. So it happened Daisy was out on the veranda as the carriage stopped at the gate, and he alighted, and, with feeble step, advanced up the walk. She sprang to meet him, with a cry of alarm.

"Oh, Ray, what is it? Are you sick? Let me

help you into the house. Fortunately, Edward is within."

She helped him up the steps, into the little sitting room; and, with a weary sigh, he sank down upon a sofa. "It is nothing but sheer exhaustion," he said to her, with a faint smile. "A few day's rest, and your nursing, will make a new man of me."

Just then Edward came hastily in, having heard Daisy's cry of alarm. He at once ordered Ray to his room, and to bed. "Not but what we shall pull you through all right, Ray," he said. "But there is no place like a bed for solid rest; and that you have got to take, with something to tone up your system. A day or two of quietness now may save you a long sickness."

Ray submitted to his directions, for his own good sense confirmed them; and a half hour later he was sleeping as soundly as a child. For three days Edward kept him in bed, while Daisy brought him the most appetizing and nourishing food, prepared by her own hands. His vigorous constitution reasserted itself; and on the fourth day he descended to the sitting room quite like himself. But Daisy would not permit him even yet to exert himself to any great extent, and insisted that he should frequently lie down upon the lounge she had brought into the sitting room, and upon which she had arranged a profusion of pillows.

He lay there in the afternoon, while she sat in a low

rocker by his side, and he was telling her of the great harvest of souls that had been gathered in at Easton, when Edward drove up to the door in a light buggy, having with him Miss Sadye Greenough, the daughter of Mr. Greenough, principal of the Afton Graded School. Hitching the horse, he assisted Miss Sadye to alight, and the two came in where Ray and Daisy were.

The two girls greeted each other as old friends and schoolmates always do, and Edward placed another rocker for Miss Sadye beside Daisy's, while he sat down on the lounge at Ray's feet. Ray had risen to greet Miss Greenough, for she was an old school friend of his also ; but, at the earnest solicitation of all, had resumed his position on the pillows.

"Ray," said Edward, laying his hand on his old chum's, "I have a little business with you and Daisy ; and as Sadye is interested in it also, I brought her along with me. You have, I expect, had some idea that I was a little partial in my feelings toward Sadye ; and a few weeks ago, as she may have written you, I found she cared a little something about me. She has even promised to become my wife next month. But she is blushing so, I shall have to stop all that talk, and come directly to the proposition we have to make. It is this : instead of setting up a separate establishment of our own, we will come here. Sadye will take the place of Daisy at the head of the household affairs, and in the care of

mother. This will leave Daisy free. You can be married when we are, and in October she can go with you to the mission field. What do you say?"

Ray sat upright, and grasped Edward's hand. "God bless you, Ned," he exclaimed, "for thinking of this, even if it is not practicable." And he looked wistfully over at Daisy.

A sudden hope had come into her heart; her eyes danced with joy; but controlling herself she turned to Sadye, saying: "I have no right to ask this of you. It would put heavy burdens upon you, such as you have not been accustomed to, and it would be selfish of me to allow it."

"Why?" said Sadye, low and earnestly. "She will be my mother as well as yours. She has a good nurse, and there is a good girl in the house. My duties cannot be excessive, and I certainly will do all I can to fill your exact place. This is my own thought, not Edward's. It is doing by you as I would be done by; as I know you would do by me if our places were reversed. I shall love to do it. Then I too love Jesus; and may I not make the little sacrifice this involves to let you go with the one of your choice to those heathen lands? Thus while at home may I not, indirectly at least, help on the Master's work abroad?"

Daisy gave the generous and thoughtful girl a hearty kiss; then she said, tremulously: "We will think this

over, and pray over it, and if God directs it, I will accept the sacrifice you offer, knowing you do it for the Master's sake, as well as for the love you have for Edward and myself. You were going with Edward, I believe, to see a patient. Why not come back here to tea, and spend the evening with us, and we will try and come to a decision. If we are to be married when you and Edward are, I shall have my hands full, and will need every moment of time between now and then."

Edward and Sadye went off on their ride, while Ray and Daisy talked and prayed over the offer Edward and his companion had so unexpectedly made.

"If I could only feel it was right to delegate my duty to another," Daisy said, "that would end the matter. But no one can care for a mother as a daughter can. I know Sadye would see that mother was comfortable in every way. That is not the chief trouble. It is that mother will not see me, and I cannot bear to give her this pain; she has so little now to comfort her."

"Why not talk it over with her, and see what she says about it?" Ray asked. "You know at the very outset she was willing you should go. She is able to understand all you say, even if she cannot speak, and a look or a nod will give us some idea of how she feels. I would not for a moment want you to go, if she seems unwilling to part with you."

Daisy was silent for some little time. "Ray dear,"

she finally said, "now that you have suggested this I do believe that is what has troubled mother. When I told her how you had postponed your going for a while, I thought she tried to make me understand something, but what it was I could not tell. After my sickness I told her of your decision to go without me, and there has been a troubled look in her eyes ever since. It certainly, as you say, can do no harm to tell her of Sadye's proposition, and see how she feels."

At the supper table Daisy spoke to Edward and Sadye about Ray's suggestion to talk the matter over with the mother. Edward at once approved of the plan, and a little later the four went to the invalid's room. All greeted her with a kiss, and then Daisy slowly and distinctly told her frankly of the offer Sadye had made. She assured her that all desired the mother's will to be carried out, and that would make them the happiest which would give her the greatest joy. A great flash of intelligence passed over the invalid's face as Daisy spoke; and when Daisy had finished, she tried to lift one of her hands toward Ray. He saw the movement, and with a quick intuition of her meaning he stepped quickly to the bedside and took Daisy's hand into his own. Again that flash of intelligence passed over the face of the mother, and her lips seemed to be moving, though no sound escaped them. They watched her; and then, to the astonishment of all, those lips for the first time in many

months gave forth an utterance. All heard clearly and distinctly the single word, "Go."

Edward hastened to his mother's side, and watching those lips requested the mother to speak again. In vain she tried, though her eyes fastened upon Ray and Daisy with a look which showed plainly that none had misunderstood her desire.

On a soft balmy June day, therefore, three weeks later, a double marriage took place at the Lawton cottage. It was a quiet simple affair in all of its arrangements. The invalid mother was raised on pillows, so that her eyes could rest upon the two couples as Mr. Carleton spoke the words that joined each for life to the chosen one. Only the immediate families of the young people were present, and after the ceremony had been performed Edward and his bride departed for a brief bridal tour, while Ray and Daisy remained quietly at the cottage until their return. Then Daisy was to accompany Ray to Easton.

Ray had brought his books with him, and Daisy and he spent their leisure moments studying the language of the people to whom they were now so soon to go. On the Sunday that Edward was absent, Ray readily arranged with Mr. Carleton to go up to Easton for him, while he preached to the First Church people.

Just a week after the marriage, Edward and his wife returned, and it had been arranged that they and Daisy

and Ray should spend the evening in the mother's room. Mrs. Lawton had been raised upon pillows to greet the returning couple, and Edward, sitting down by the bedside, gave her a most entertaining account of the places he and his bride had visited. The mother's face clearly manifested her joy at the happiness of her son and daughter, and she looked from one couple to the other with intense satisfaction beaming from her expressive eyes. After a time, lest they should weary the mother, all but Edward departed. He delayed a moment to assist the nurse in placing the invalid back in her accustomed position in bed. He had scarcely done this, however, when a cry escaped him that brought all the others back to the room. They had no need to ask what had alarmed him. The look on the mother's face told them the great change, long dreaded, had come. Her eyes were uplifted, her lips struggled to speak ; for the second time, since her sudden affliction came upon her, she spoke. Softly she whispered the word "peace," and then she was at rest.

Ray closed his work at Easton, much to the regret of his people, on September first. That month he and Daisy spent at Afton with Edward and his wife. Early in October they sailed on the steamship *Illyria*, Captain Tom Branford, master, for Liverpool, intending there to take direct passage for their field of labor. As the steamer moved slowly down the harbor, Ray and Daisy stood on

its deck, looking off toward the fast receding land. Ray's countenance indicated deep thought, but not until the land had vanished from sight did Daisy disturb him. Then she gently asked:

"What is it, Ray?"

He looked down into her upturned face with a bright smile.

"I was thinking of that passage in Isaiah," he answered, "that reads, 'And an highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness.' I was reviewing my life since I became God's child, and that passage came to mind. It seemed to me I had, during these years that have gone, been slowly traveling up that highway. Sometimes I have thought the byways offered a safer footing, and I have ventured into them, only to find that the Lord's appointed way was the only one that offered peace and safety. I have had my valley of humiliation and self-surrender. I believe I am now willing to say, 'Thy will be done.'"

"The moment you reached that point, I was snatched from death's door, and the way was opened for me to walk with you directly on to what we believed to be our life work," said Daisy, thoughtfully. "What is the lesson we are to learn?"

"That we must hold all we have, even those we love best, subject to the will of God," Ray responded, promptly. "He will have nothing put before himself."

“It cost us a year of delay in our chosen work, nevertheless, to know that experience,” added Daisy, with a sigh.

“And yet not a lost year,” remarked Ray, with something like satisfaction in his tones. “Our labor on the field to which we go would not have been worth half what it will now be had we gone without this experience through which we have in twelve months passed. We have, I firmly believe, advanced much nearer to the Master; we have placed ourselves in sweeter and more tender relations with him; we can each hear him say, in loving accents, ‘Thou art mine.’ We have found more than redemption, more than intimacy—even complete identification with him. Those old words that my mother found so precious when dying, and which had such a fascination for me in the prayer room so many years ago, have now become words of absolute experience in our religious lives. We go with glad hearts to our appointed field, though the way is untried and the future unknown, because we can each hear the Saviour saying, with all the force of a divine promise, ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.’”











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